Performance ritual and the construction of selfhood and identity among older people in West Fife

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Declaration

This thesis entitled *Performance ritual and the construction of selfhood and identity among older people in West Fife* is the result of the independent investigation of the candidate. It has not already been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signature

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Abstract

This study examines the experience of old age among older people within different settings in West Fife. It is an anthropological and phenomenological study of ritual performances of identity, and means by which older people accomplish the development of a collective identity, their selfhood, their interpretation of the world and their values.

The majority of respondents are working-class individuals from former mining, farming, or railway communities: among these, detailed attention is given to the residents of two sheltered homes; clients of a lunch club for the elderly; and a group of retired railwaymen. The purpose of ritual performance in the reconstruction and presentation of identity is explored. Ritual is seen as a performative genre, encompassing both transition (rites of passage) and transformation (rites of identity). The genres of social events such as coffee mornings, oral history, formal house meetings and other events participated in by the elderly are read as ritual performances.

An individual's sense of the need for adjustment to old age derives from the incongruent realities of a personal sense of continuity and the discontinuity of the ageing body. This results in resort to various means of reconstructing identity - both collectively and individually. This developing identity must be viewed as part of an on-going and interactive relationship between self and culture, past and present, enacted particularly in peer and kin relationships.

In negotiating the incongruent realities of 'change' and 'continuity' the elderly are constrained both by structural inequalities and a socially-ascribed liminality. Where these predominate, performances of identity reveal as much about social division and exclusion as they do about social integration and inclusion, with the institutionalised self being remade in a social image of elderhood, fostering invisibility and vulnerability. Other environments, through metaphoric strategies and the rehearsal of social exchange and interdependency, serve to mask the institutional process by fostering the key ideas of 'belonging' and 'solidarity' - the cardinal attributes of imagined communities of the past. The elderly draw from the past, interpreting and recreating it as a resource for being in the present. In no setting, however, is it clear that the use of collective forms to assert identity signals uniformities of identity. The settings are arenas for contrasting differences, revealing that participants aspire towards their individuality and a remaking of an individual self. This emerges, at least in part, as a consequence of the ambiguous role of ritual performance in the establishment of meanings of selfhood and society.

The study offers fresh insight into the conditions of collective life among the old. Through ritual older people construct their own terms of membership and, at the same time, maintain their self-integrity, using the same performance to assert both selfhood and social identity. In particular the study focuses on the importance of the recognition of inner identity (the interplay between individual and collective identity) and the place of ritual performance in dealing with uncertain and anxious periods of life, and the contribution towards this of individual and collective biography within a shared social, cultural and historical context.

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Explanatory notes

The use of Scots

In the study I have chosen to write people's speech in their colloquial language, using "Scots" as defined by the Collins Pocket Scots Dictionary. This is neither standard British English nor general slang (Collins, 1996:v). The dialect used is that of Central Scots, which is the most widely spoken form of Scots (*ibid,*1996:viii), the subdivision of East Central Scots being spoken in Fife. I should point out, however, that the words and phrases used in everyday normal conversation did not mean that these were exclusive to Fife, nor that people used only Scots as part of their natural language. Some spoke broader forms of Scots than others; some spoke "Scottish English"; some spoke English. I have tried to be true to the variety of different dialects and languages, rather than standardise these within an artificial literary Scots. Where I believe that a term is regional I have indicated this at the point of reference in the study.

Confidentiality

The names given to the housing schemes in this study are fictional; as are the names of the individuals mentioned, but the ethnography included in this study is very much the vital and durable legacy of the Fifers whom I moved among and who were observed nearby or from afar.

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The auld broun troot lay unner a stane,
Unner a stane lay he,
An he thocht o' the wund,
An he thocht o' the rain,
An the troot that he uist tae be.

A'm a gey auld troot, said he tae hissel,
A gey auld troot, said he,
An there's mony a queer-like
Tale A cuid tell
O' the things that hae happened tae me.

They wee-hafflin trooties are a' verra smert,
They're a' verra smert, said he,
They ken a' the rules
O' the gemm aff by hairt,
An they're no aften catched, A'll agree.

They're thinkin A'm auld an they're thinkin A'm duin,
They're thinkin A'm duin, said he,
They're thinkin A'm no
Worth the flirt o' a fin
Or the blink o' a bonnie black ee.

But A'm safe an A'm snug in ma bonnie wee neuk,
A'm safe an A'm snug, said he,
A'm the big fish that
Nae fusher can heuk,
An A'll aye be that - till A dee!

Bairnsangs: Nursery Rhymes in Scots by Sandy Thomas Ross

Section 1

Introduction and Methodology

"Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"
"To the curious incident of the dog in the night time."
"The dog did nothing in the night time."
"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Homes

From *Silver Blaze* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Chapter 1

Introductory Essay

Introduction

This study examines the experience of old age among older people within different settings in West Fife in Scotland, between the years 1993 and 1995. Of the four settings drawn upon in the text, two comprise sheltered housing complexes[1]; the third is a lunch club for elderly women and the fourth is a men's oral history group. Within each I explore the competence of 'performance ritual' as a means enabling people to make sense of their experiences of ageing. I have set out below my explanation for applying the term 'performance ritual' to action which was not always obviously 'performance' or 'ritual'. To begin with, however, I wish simply to state that 'performance ritual' seemed to be used more or less successfully to allow older people to accomplish, for themselves, the development of a collective identity, their selfhood, their interpretation of the world and its values.

Of the many approaches to ritual, I was drawn, first, to Arnold Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's analyses of *rites de passage* - rites that both mark and bring about transitions in the life cycle. Myerhoff (1984:307) argues that during rites of passage distinctions are made clear between the fundamental defining categories of young and old; male and female; living and dead. Thus, of the myriad kinds of rituals (Gluckman, 1962; Goody, 1958; La Fontaine, 1972; Moore, 1975) those concerned with transitions in the life cycle might be expected to be the most relevant to ageing. It is possible to argue, for example, that a move to sheltered housing places older people in a transitional state - they are 'separated' and to some extent, isolated from their previous relationships and roles and confined to a new social membership within the house. They are 'sheltered from' as well as 'sheltered by' their new housing. Perhaps this is all more figurative than literal, but one might argue that participants form a new and separate category through the token category of 'residential status'. Of course, given that not all elderly move into sheltered housing or, indeed, move house

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[1] Sheltered Housing forms part of the growing range of housing available primarily for elderly people. This is, 'housing which has been purpose-built or purpose-converted primarily for elderly people; a scheme consisting of grouped independent accommodation linked to a warden by an alarm system' (Fennell, 1987:1).

at all, this is not, unlike retirement or funerals, a 'universal' rite of passage. But, in view of the fact that there is considerable support for the observation that the current living arrangements for many elderly people are inappropriate (Bond, 1993:224) and that migration in later life is increasing (Law and Warnes, 1975; 1980) one might conclude that such transitions are likely to take place for an increasing proportion of elderly people.

Related to this, my second approach to the way in which I put the term 'ritual' to use derives from an awareness of the absence of public social rituals during later life. Because of this, I argue that a great many older people create their own private rituals. This takes place through a variety of means but largely through the process of ordering and making life a little more certain and predictable during times of anxiety and helplessness, characterised by the formalised social order of, for example, moving into sheltered housing or retirement. The intellectual goal is to approach the genres of social events such as coffee mornings, oral history, formal house meetings and other events participated in by the elderly as a single coherent group: as performance rituals. They are rooted in different origins: in socialising, in fun-making, in teaching (story-telling), in democratic enterprise, but all with the purpose of presentation of identity. The collective events to which I refer are revealed as *performance rituals of identity*: 'rites of identity' as opposed to 'rites of transition'; 'transforming' rather than 'transporting' (Schechner, 1990). Unless otherwise indicated I refer throughout the study to these *performance ritual*s as, simply, 'performances', noting that whilst all ritual is performance, not all performance is ritual. In most instances, these performances restructure and provide redressive machinery, altering, even if only temporarily, the composure of identity. Durkheim (1938) has argued that to be fully dynamic systems, law needs crime, religion needs sin. In the same light, identity restructuring needs some kind of 'war on identity' in order to bring it to life. 'Without "doing"' writes Victor Turner, 'without the social friction that fires consciousness and self-consciousness, social life would be passive, even inert' (1990:9). These considerations led Barbara Myerhoff to distinguish 'definitional ceremonies' as a kind of collective autobiography: a means by which a group creates its identity by telling a story about itself, in the course of which it brings to life 'the essential ideas that define (it)' (Myerhoff, 1979:32). For example, in my study the oral history group is both private *performance ritual* (private to its participants) and definitional ceremony. Through it, participants sort, classify and order their memories - giving a last look at what has been, discarding some

memories, rearranging others - a final imposition of their own human identity and purpose.

In adopting notions of ritual that do not necessarily conform with those of other anthropologists I am aware of entering dangerous waters. In order to avoid this dilemma it would have been possible to yield to Gluckman[2] and avoid the use of the word 'ritual' altogether; or seek, like Rappaport[3], to broaden its definition to the point of making it almost unchallengeable. Yet neither option would resolve the 'problem' of ritual (Bell, 1992:vii), emanating from both a wide disagreement as to how the word should be understood (Leach, 1968:526) and the serious problems created in determining the nature of ritual in such a way that we can always say what it is, or what it is not (La Fontaine, 1985:11). Ultimately, and taking La Fontaine's point that the terms 'technical, ceremonial and ritual are arbitrary distinctions among phenomena that are themselves not easily classified' (1972:161), I read ritual as a performative genre (Fernandez, 1987:7; Myerhoff, 1990:247; Schechner, 1990:25), with the significant caveat that such performance does not simply confer social identity. It provides also a means by which individuals construct their terms of membership and their meanings of selfhood and identity. In this light, as Cohen points out, it may be necessary to 'deal with as many "texts" of the ritual as there are participants, for we are theoretically bound to acknowledge each of them as authors' (1993:62).

Objectives

Two objectives lie at the heart of this study. The first is to assess how performance assists the resolution of selfhood and social identity; continuity and change in old age. The second, to show the relevance of this for an understanding of the current situation of older people in our society.

Underwriting these objectives are three strands to the thinking behind the way in which the research has been undertaken. The first concerns the idea that the relationship between the 'old' and 'others' is a reflection of how people see themselves and how they form relationships with others. The second idea concerns the control and order imposed over particular social groups, in this case, older people, and the way in

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2 Gluckman (1962:21), for example, prefers the term 'ceremony' as a category encompassing both, what he calls 'ceremonious' and 'ritual'

3 Rappaport takes ritual 'to be *the* basic social act' (1979:174, emphasis in original).

which this social role is underlined and communicated. The third strand concerns the way in which we read the insider-participant's story. Old age is a cultural concept which represents one way of seeing. Mine or yours. But as long as we remain outside the bounds of old age our own perception will be lacking. My method embodies a phenomenological as well as anthropological approach. It is phenomenological in the sense that, first, I have tried to take the individual's point of view and tried to discover the meaning he or she gives to experience (Coleman, 1993b: 123); and, second, that it focuses on the activity of *performance ritual making itself* out of its essential materials: speech, sound, movement, environment and so on, to reveal how older people signify themselves and their world through their relationship with others.

Moving into the field of view

Reading the accounts of anthropologists from Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown onwards, my experience of entry into the field as an anthropologist did not seem to differ remarkably from that of anybody else. By entering Fife society and locating myself among the elderly I was, almost immediately, made forcibly aware of the cultural and social systems which I had 'left behind'. My field methods were traditional in the sense that I sought locations or groups: housing schemes for the elderly; groups of people distinguished by their age. I accessed these groups, provided myself with or was provided with a role; and recorded and wrote extensive, qualitative fieldnotes.

What emerges in the following chapters is a dialogue fashioned by the people among whom I worked as an anthropologist and lived as an individual. My own personal experiences, together with my own intellectual and emotional responses, comprised a necessary part of that dialogue and presented a valid and potent source of anthropological knowledge. The partial focus on 'me' - even the writing of this research in the first person, rather than the third person, was novel. For a long time I tried to resist self-inclusion, feeling that the focus should necessarily be on Fifers, not myself. But, as is made clear in the work edited by Clifford and Marcus (1986) and by others such as Geertz (1988) and Hastrup (1992), all writing is the product of the writer's senses, judgements, prejudices, history and idiosyncrasies and for the writer to assert otherwise represents nothing other than self-delusion about the authority of the account unfolding.

In order to draw attention to the importance of the encounter between the self and other I have chosen to present my findings unconstrained by the scientific rigour of adhering

only to the information and data gleaned whilst taking part in a true 'field experience'. Neither the spatial boundary of the housing scheme nor the temporal boundary of a three-year funded research project imply limits to the sphere of study. The locational, compositional and temporal boundaries embody conceptual boundaries which segment and divide the continuum of human life and development into discrete and separate categories. Whilst the physical spatial boundary of a housing complex is indeed important, it is not in itself the object of study here; the same is true of the categories of people whose activities I have observed and explored. The result has been to draw on as much as possible of encountered experience and my life's experience during my period in the field, whether or not this took place in my specific field locations or among specific groups demarcated for study.

By bringing in the experiences of a range of people in discrete old-age settings in West Fife, I have attempted to draw together a balanced representation of culture among them. I did not start from a stereotypic approach of previously identified problems; there was no ready-made notion of what the results might look like; there was little conception of unity. My method was justified by a belief that the elderly themselves would illuminate the issues of importance within their lives. It has consisted of apparently random explorations of external reality (places, encounters, conversations) and explorations of inner reality, such as dreams and memories. From all of these emerged a great many 'flash-forwards' or conceptions about the possibility of my own old age. I do not use the word 'reality' lightly here but simply wish to add, at this point that, as the field work progressed, my conception of 'reality' reached beyond that of Berger and Luckmann (1967:13) who appear to cast it wholly as a social construction.

Although the study considers old age with respect to different groups of elderly people it is within one epoch of their lives. The word 'epoch' gives an impression of coherence and unity, but the 'wholeness' is arbitrary. I use epoch rather than period since epoch is an emic periodization. This whole epoch is of internal relevance - the year of 1994. I have not looked at the bigger events which happened during the year although this is not because they were unimportant. They were what Hastrup (1985) refers to as 'points of rupture in the dimensions of time'. For older people there were historical events commemorated, for example, D Day remembrances. Then there were those of relevance to family, neighbours, Dunfermline, Fife, Scotland and the world itself: the war in Bosnia; the death of John Smith, Leader of the Labour Party; the imposition of VAT on fuel; the launch of the National Lottery. I have tried to take a 'dialogical'

approach (Hastrup, 1992:126) to the ethnography, looking at both personal and historical changes in Fife society. For the greater part, however, it is the more personal and local issues that take precedence.

Close encounters

In practical terms, I spent time among seven different 'groups' of people. In terms of duration, not all of these groups were observed to the same degree. In this study I have drawn upon four: first, the residents of the sheltered housing scheme Windsor Court; second, the residents of another sheltered housing scheme Phillip House; third, members of a lunch club that used the facilities of Windsor Court but did not live there; and fourth, a railwaymen's oral history group, located in the town of Thornton.

By the time I had 'completed' my field work I had been made only too well aware of a harsh fact of life: anthropological fieldwork generates an awful lot of data. That I was in danger of becoming overwhelmed by the amount and variety of information forced me to make some difficult choices. There was no definite or correct solution to the problem of what to leave in and what to cut out. Out of the seven 'groups' of older people, the remaining three comprised the participants of a walking Club; the clients of an OAP Welfare Centre in Kincardine; and, finally, the members of Dunfermline Elderly Forum (a political lobbying group). My reasons for omitting them here are entirely the consequence of time and other resource constraints. I felt, for the most part, unable to do justice to them, other than in a peripheral sense. Shadows and reflections flit through this study; I have no doubt they have altered some of my ideas and preconceptions but detailed reference has been excluded. They help to cast a different perspective on the ageing process. In similar vein to the railwaymen's group, they help to provide understanding that ageing does not always proceed in a culture of care, and they assist in the attempt to reveal the diversity of social and cultural contexts within which older people live out their lives - not all to do with illness and proximity to death.

Emerging from all of these group settings I took up opportunities to visit old people in their own homes, both within the sheltered complexes and outside; I visited a local hospital, went on two coach trips and several bus rides; went to parties; helped with fund-raising sales; played bingo, dominoes and other games; and gave car lifts when occasion demanded.

In order to qualify for residential status within a sheltered housing scheme, one has to be among the approximately 40% of those aged over 60 in Scotland who suffer from a long-term illness. The men and women are part of a rapidly growing population within Fife and within Scotland. Of the 4.9 million inhabitants of Scotland some 908,486 are of pensionable age (60+ for women and 65+ for men). Pensioners, outnumbering school children, comprise 21% of the entire population of Scotland. Among the 'oldest old' there are three times more women than men. Within the settings of the sheltered homes the men occupied increasingly isolated 'gender islands'; reflecting this fact that, as they aged, they were fewer and fewer in an enlarging society of women. With the significant exception of the railwaymen's oral history group, they speak as isolated voices, representing their individuality rather than a unified dialogue. As so often happens I established a particularly rewarding relationship with one of them who, as also often happens, was something of an outsider. This was Jim. Teacher, mentor, philosopher, Jim was many things to many people and he leaves an indelible mark on this study. He and his wife, Jean, had not been long enough at Phillip House to be able to provide knowledge about the collectivity within which they now had their home. Furthermore, both suffered from debilitating illnesses which excluded them from active participation. I have devoted a fuller section to some of their conversations because they also provide a reflection of my own personality, biases, history and sensibility and these, of course, significantly influence the findings.

Windsor Court residents

The social endowment of the residents of the sheltered housing complex, Windsor Court, was a broad reflection of that encountered elsewhere in West Fife. Mostly working class, they came from families where the main income was generated by mining, farming or work in the dockyards or on the railways. Some were former residents of towns like Dunfermline, Inverkeithing, Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath. Others had moved, often quite recently, with age and infirmity, from outlying villages and rural areas into the housing complexes provided in the towns.

The residents comprised mostly women. Their paid working lives had been terminated many years before, by marriage, by raising a family and, sometimes, by illness. Few were self-pitying. Their accomplishments are important precisely because they are not heroes or saints, although in the strangely prosaic life of 'wife and mother' perhaps they should be regarded as such. For the greater part of their

lives, most had served as carers; first, in bringing up children; second, in looking after their spouse, in a very real sense if he had endured terminal illness or other physical and mental disability during his latter years. Some of the women had been single for decades. They were bearers of a culture that would die with them. The mines had closed or were closing; the Naval Dockyard at Rosyth, the Region's main employer, faced an uncertain future. They were an invisible people, marginal to mainstream society; an impotent group - economically, physically and politically.

This is not to say that there was no diversity for Windsor Court, like any gathering of individuals, brought together the reserved and the extrovert; the cold and the warm hearted; the illiterate and well-read; enthusiasts; cynics; optimists; the selfish; the generous; the garrulous; the witty and the sad. They were all there. Yet, at the same time, underwriting their customs, their conversations and their homes within Windsor Court, there was a surprising degree of commonality. Honesty and equity were of considerable importance to them. They valued those who could make them laugh; loved jokes; were easily pleased; were uncomfortable with formality; disliked pretentious or patronising people; and were rarely content unless they felt of use. They were, first and foremost, members of families: grandmothers, wives or aunts, and only as a poor second did they see themselves as individuals who had become old in years. As Kaufman so strongly urged in her own study *The Ageless Self*: they did not perceive meaning in being old; rather, they perceived meaning in being themselves in old age (1986:6).

Performance at Windsor Court

Occasions for getting together at Windsor Court were limited but there was a weekly 'coffee morning' in the ground floor common room. As an unchanging *performance ritual* from week to week, it set the scene for the sort of residential and institutional life enjoyed by the residents. Indeed, there were few competing alternatives.

For many of the residents accessing the common room, for the purpose of attending public gatherings there, was difficult; the physiological constraints of old age weighed heavily against mobility. Propped up by up to twenty forms of medication they may each ingest on a daily basis, they were reminded of their physiological deterioration from the moment they awoke, until the moment they sank into sleep - not necessarily at night. Their horizons became the possibilities provided by the day ahead. Ordinary, everyday activities were Everests to be conquered. Walking was an act to be negotiated with an unyielding body that sometimes refused to co-operate; each step was

a conscious dedication to living well today and maintaining independence. Although that was a strange word to use at Windsor Court. For what claim could anyone who lived there have to independence? They were all slaves to something: their illnesses; their arthritic limbs; their former lives; their families. Old age and ill health had brought them to Windsor Court. The building now defined the area of their lives both physically and metaphorically.

In the common room the women settled in groups of two or three, staking out their territory within the generous space. Some, like Mrs McCrae, were frail and bent like wind-blown trees; others, sturdy, robust beings, like Mrs Drummond, who propelled herself expertly forward, skiing slowly over the carpet by means of a walking aid clasped over each arm.

Talking was the primary objective of the coffee morning. They might live beside each other but sometimes the women talked as though separated for a month or more. The emotional urgency of conversations had little to do with content. Mundane exchanges were sometimes strangely intent. It was not what was said that was important; it was as though the residents needed to be seen and heard from before it was too late. Their conversation was a continuing social commentary about their condition. The temporary release of oral energy, among people who were there by circumstance rather than by choice, was somehow proof of their vitality and activity. When the flow of conversation ceased, as it often did, the ensuing silence was an unreassuring atmospheric void in which the residents seemed almost to tangibly struggle for a way out.

Whereas to the outsider the social events, laid on for and attended by the residents, seemed to represent a perpetual admission procedure into the institution of old age, for the participants, they provided an opportunity to move temporarily beyond this. Even such an apparently routine business as the coffee morning allowed them to transcend the stark facts of old age and to feel incorporated as fuller members of society. The same biological features - failing eyesight, decaying teeth, furrowed brows - that isolated and confined the women to each other's company as marginal beings sanctioned them into this performance, where the cultural imperatives of dress, behaviour, specific food and drink, allowed socialisation.

'Whit are ye daein' among a' us auldies?'

I had been attending the coffee morning at Windsor Court for four weeks. The room was alive with chatter and I had seated myself beside Mrs MacBeth. I had not seen her there before and we exchanged greetings and names. She looked at me curiously before launching into conversation. "Whit are ye daein' among a' us auldies?" she asked. Having already rehearsed my response several times before I explained that I was studying at Edinburgh University and that I was interested in the lives of older people living in Fife and what it was like to be old in today's society. She chuckled. "Weel, ye've got a hard job on yer hauns there! " I acknowledged this point and mentioned that I was interested in finding out about people's lives, where people had come from, their families and their work.

"Weel, Ah'll tell ye aboot mines, if ye really want tae hear".[4] And she did.

Her story, however, disclosed very little about herself; instead, it revealed a considerable amount of factual information about her children's achievements. She had four children, and although physically separated from all of them, they remained an obvious pre-occupation. As she spoke, however, it became clear that her children's and grandchildren's intellectual accomplishments, better education and different histories had led to more than just a physical separation. Yet she did not allow that separation to be easily bridged:

"They're very guid tae me; they keep in touch. But, Ah says tae them, 'ye hae yer ain lives tae lead. Dinna fash yersels aboot me'".

In this single statement Mrs Macbeth revealed her desire to remain independent. In her pride at her children's achievements - 'Helen's a lawyer' - she acknowledged, simultaneously, her loss, since such achievements had radically separated her from her daughter's life.

At Windsor Court the residents led lives independently, for the most part, of their children and, often, independently of each other. On a day to day basis many were

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effectively on their own. Socialising at events such as the coffee morning, was an acknowledgement of their participation in a common scheme. For some it was also an opportunity to be relieved of the loneliness which afflicted them. They longed for company but cherished their independence.

Many found themselves on unfamiliar territory among strangers when they arrived at Windsor Court. Although, simply by taking up residence there, they recognised their commonality with their peers, most had left behind a community of friends and neighbours that did not readily re-establish in their new setting. The cultural setting at Windsor Court was not exclusive to that building but embodied wider cultural events, social activities, religious ceremonies and all the social and political processes developed in the town and indeed the region and country in which it was situated. Yet, these women were, in one sense, immigrants and, according to Myerhoff (1979:225), all immigrants acquire a second culture. Not, perhaps as emotionally powerful as the first culture, the one associated with childhood and family, but one which may exist in its own right and be practised and distinguished from the customs of the outside society. It is this second culture which I refer to sometimes as a 'House culture'. This was something which had emerged over the years, drawn from the twin conditions of residents finding, among their peers, continuities between past and present, together with a newly developing social isolation.

Structure and style of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is intended to fulfil three purposes: I have tried, first of all, to adequately render the speech and action of the elders, both through preserving accounts of collective exchanges but also through the speech of particular individuals. Many verbatim statements are included. A considerable number of the conversations which I captured through the use of my memory or a tape recorder are lengthy, rambling accounts, which I trawled, seeking pointers to the richness and diversity of people's beliefs and experiences amid what might superficially be regarded as a sea of trivia. These were conversations, seldom speeches, but even so it would have been difficult to leave them out without losing some of the vitality and originality of the elders' experiences. There were other significant implications too. Even when nothing appeared to be happening in many of the fragmented dramas I witnessed, there were a whole series of psychological mini-dramas deep within the dialogue which surfaced and merited examination. These were articulations of the under-

meaning - spoken of by the director Peter Stein as 'that most famous discovery of the playwright Chekov': the fact that what was actually said was not at all what was intended to be expressed.

My second purpose is to present an enormously rich and complex array of data in a way that allows a chain of enquiry to emerge and yet, at the same time, an holistic account to be preserved. I have tried not to be preoccupied with the perspective of old age as a 'stage of life' but to interpret it in a life course and historical context.

My third purpose is to reveal my own place in the presentation of the material: the development of my own personal understanding. As time went on, working among these specialists in being human, I learned. More and more I found myself forced to shed any unnecessary thought or speculation. I had to hone myself down to just being there. My sense of myself was in the third person.

This, then, is a record not only of an encounter among older people in Fife, but an encounter with self, revealing the often painful but crucial question of my own personal preconceptions of familiar social categories. If personal doubts and misgivings sometimes threaten to diminish the authority of the writing this is the inevitable result of a healthy scepticism about my ability and qualification to make statements about the people within such categories. For as Myerhoff so rightly states 'when I judge these people, I judge myself' (1979:28).

The style in which this thesis is written deserves comment. I have drawn heavily on the vernacular social discourse that formed the building blocks of my ethnographic material. In doing so I run the risk of being criticised that this oral evidence cannot possibly *all* be relevant to the study in hand. Perhaps it is not. It is certainly not all included in the account that follows; even so it remains very evident. I therefore ask the reader to bear with me and to look upon the inclusion of this wealth of narrative as a metaphor for the lived experience of many of the people whom I studied. Being and meaning are intimately related with narrative (Myerhoff, 1979:xi). Had I simply given an 'impression' of the original quality of individuals' speech then it would have been to preserve only a musty stillness rather than the vitality, complexity and paradox emerging in conversations. I believe that the narrative reveals the very processes through which older people weave meaning and identity out of their experiences and memories.

Organisation of chapters

In order to impose a sense of order throughout the study I have divided it into five sections, the first of which comprises the introduction and methodology; and the last of which constitutes the conclusion.

Section 1 - Introduction and methodology

After the introduction, the study begins in Chapter 2 with a description of the way in which I went about the work. It describes how and why I eventually chose to carry out an ethnographic study among older people; it draws attention to the lack of anthropological field research not only among older people, but also within our 'own' culture, together with the problems of conducting ethnographic field work in the latter environment. The practical aspects of field work are related, and some epistemological and ideological aspects explored.

Throughout the thesis the enactment of *performance ritual*s and ceremonies in the presentation of collective knowledge provides a variety of means by which older people accomplish the development of a collective identity, their selfhood, their interpretation of the world and their values. Chapter 2 draws attention not only to the social construction of old age, but also to the degree of social and ceremonial specificity surrounding old age, which is generally less than that accorded earlier phases in the life cycle. Given this, it is perhaps somewhat perverse that I have chosen to stress the role of ritual, although it is, of course (Bell, 1992; Bryman, 1987), a central concern of social anthropologists. Performance ritual took the form of the reconstruction of stable and often mythological entities within which past lives were lived. It acted as a sort of mask covering the turbulence of relations within each setting. For in none of the settings described were the elderly people tightly bound together; they existed in a network of relations that never really developed into clear and robust social organisations.

Chapter 3 deals with the primary research settings, Windsor Court and Phillip House, describing the physical environments and introducing the problems of and opportunities for identity construction among residents with regard to the means by which they were able to draw continuity with their past lives. In this chapter I also draw attention to the establishment of my own identity among the residents and comment on some of the more obvious ethical and moral dilemmas that confronted me.

Section 2 - Ageing and identity

Chapter 4 concerns itself with problems of identity in old age, examining both the theory and the reality behind how tensions arising from the disjunction between a personal sense of continuity and the discontinuity of the ageing body are articulated, expressed and mediated. This is a scene-setting chapter. Even so, its purpose is to present reasons behind the primacy of the self in old age, focusing on individual survival strategies and resourcefulness - the accumulated capital of experience. The need for individual autonomy - the individual as an agent - was deeply felt and emerged significantly throughout the study.

Images of old age affect our views of how people adjust in later life. Erikson (1963:263-269) saw ageing as an integral part of the life span. He also powerfully conveyed the idea that in order to understand a person in old age it is necessary to see him or her in the context of a whole life history with the problems both successfully and unsuccessfully resolved from earlier periods of life. Chapters 5 and 6 expose the cultural context within which this developing identity must be viewed as part of an on-going and interactive relationship between self and culture. Different themes emerge not only from individual perspectives but from the play of broader cultural forces on that perspective: the reality of living in a certain society at a particular time. The experiences of childhood and early adulthood, documented in chapter 5 contextualise the whole within wider Fife society. This chapter also has a less immediate but equally significant purpose. For the elders' experience was not so much of having lived in a particular historical time, although this did result in some communal identity to which they laid occasional claim in statements such as: 'we fowk who lived through the Wars' or 'we auldies'. It was their experience of family, neighbourhood and community within which they grew up that became significant. In order to recapture this experience the elders' retreat into the past, even though providing for them merely a product of their imaginations, allowed them to identify the sort of person they were - to relocate themselves in their new and complex situations. This retreat served a particular purpose in enabling them to improvise a reconciled or syncretic culture, made up of a common childhood past combined with their values and experiences of adulthood and old age.

Apart from revealing how a major world event, the Second World War, shaped opportunities in an individual's life, chapter 6 draws the reader into an intimate exploration of the reminiscing of an elderly couple; the pain and beauty and purpose of

memory and the evaluation of one's life by the fitting together of its various fragments. It seeks to begin to show how the self is implicated in the various refractions of the social and cultural relationships between the self and other; the heart and the head; the conscious and the unconscious; history and autobiography; and other 'mighty opposites' (Myerhoff, 1979:ix).

Section 3 - Reconstructions of identity

Chapters 7 to 10 deal exclusively with life within the sheltered housing complexes, Windsor Court and Phillip House, respectively. Chapter 7 evaluates the extent to which structural inequalities, in the shape of institutional patterns and socio-cultural conditioning, limited the preservation of continuity and, in so doing, limited the residents' own perceptions of themselves. One of the consequences was the disruption of solidarity, which is addressed discursively at other points in the study. This emerges most powerfully in two areas of structural conflict identified by Myerhoff (1979:33): the first is the paradox rendered by the need for passionate experiences against the desire for dignity and harmony; the second relates to the nature of the peer relationships that form among the elderly because of the extreme social and psychological need for one another contrasting with the lack of any corresponding material or economic need.

Against this background, chapters 8 and 9 seek to compare two quite different means of initiation into new kinds of social membership prevailing at each sheltered complex. The central theme running through these two chapters is the range of possibilities adopted for the management of ageing in culturally contrived situations, where the social and emotional transition of old age can be socially maintained and isolated. The text travels along a concourse revealing a variety of strategies of distancing and separation: a spectrum of social events that are in themselves forms of performance.

The elderly turned to each other, rather than their children, for witnesses to their life, but knew, as a result, that their life's experiences may not be inherited but perish with them. Chapter 10 deals with a series of inter-related concerns of the ageing process: those culturally constructed notions of the transitions which take place. It seeks to examine another discontinuity related to old age emerging from the contrast between how the elderly perceived past family life and their acknowledgement of a new form of family relationship and family responsibilities. Gillis (1996:xv) comments that we all have two families, one that we live *with* and another we live *by*. Sometimes the two

are nearly the same; mostly they are not. The question arises that if the elderly no longer live *with* a family then to what extent does the one they live *by* assume central relevance? These were elderly who had grown up in a generation that did not have to furnish itself with families to live by (Gillis, 1996:xvi). Now, physically isolated from their families, the families older people lived 'with' were much less reliable than the imagined families they lived by. The latter were not permitted to let them down. Constituted through myth, performance and image they were eternally nurturing and protective. It was this family - this often imaginary family - that they depended upon to do the symbolic work that was once assigned to religious and communal institutions (Gillis, 1996:xv).

Section 4 - Ambiguities in the role of performance ritual

Chapters 11 to 13 address the relationship of ritual to reflexive knowledge, which is inextricably woven into the interplay between change and continuity. Chapter 11 provides two illustrations of the self-conscious transforming capacity of performance ritual: the first evokes an ultimate concern with selfhood as identity; the second, the makings of a counterworld among older people - their own version of 'the good life' - meaning, intensity, consciousness - a nearly invisible world, but nonetheless of great significance for them and for society.

In chapters 12 and 13 performance is distinguished as 'definitional ceremony' through which are signified issues of selfhood and social identity. Chapter 12 represents a departure from the rest of the thesis because it draws on separate ethnographic evidence from the railwaymen's oral history group. The issues addressed are, however, supremely relevant to the main theme. They are used for comparison with those emerging in chapter 13, where the reader's attention is drawn towards the purpose and means of reminiscing and autobiography among women. A common thread is the desire for preservation - a means of self-preservation - in the memories of those left behind. But there are vital gender-related differences between the way in which this is managed through autobiography and the revitalisation of selected features of a common history. The subject of ageing and gender is approached in relation to two areas: mediating roles between nature and culture; and between instrumental and expressive roles among both women and men.

The relationship between approaching the end of one's life and approaching death reflect cultural and social relationships, made visible through performance ritual, that is, through opportunities for presenting collective knowledge. The acknowledged

primary cultural and social transitions which 'book-end' old age: retirement and death, represent the visible master transitions, the prominence of which masks a whole range of latent performance rituals and social transformations that generate conviction of self-worth and cultural fortitude among the elderly in West Fife. These were occasions during which the elderly were able to 'see' themselves. They reflect the implicit intention throughout this work - to allow others to see how the elderly view themselves and, in this way, to create opportunities for the elderly to appear in the world.

Chapter 2

Why people do what they do

Methods and Methodology

Introduction

The study of old age, *per se*, was not something I had considered in depth when I began my ethnographic work in West Fife. My previous studies, in which I had been immersed for almost two decades, had been oriented towards environmental issues. My move to West Fife was precipitated by marriage and my intention was to fit my fieldwork studies around my new residential area and new directions in my career. In this respect I did not know whether I would stay within familiar fields or channel my energies into unexplored territory.

During the first half of 1993, I lived in a modern bungalow on the fringe of Dunfermline. I familiarised myself with my new surroundings; found out where to buy my groceries; visited the local swimming pool, leisure centre and cinema; walked in the panoramic Pittencrief Park; window-shopped in the High Street on Saturday afternoons; and generally 'settled in'.

During the summer I moved house again to a more central location, closer to the core of the old town. The progress of my research seemed to me somewhat unsatisfactory. It had become clear to me that my initial aspirations, to study changing attitudes towards the natural environment, were not to be easily fulfilled. This was largely because, for the people among whom I mixed, 'the natural environment' did not figure as a major issue. It was not high on individuals' personal agendas. Health, children's education, paying the mortgage and generally 'making ends meet' were much more the sort of issues that consumed their attention; the extinction of native woodland in Scotland or the protection of badgers, generally speaking, were not.

I turned my attention to Dunfermline itself and set out on a different tack. From different quarters a number of issues had begun to emerge: from the individuals and families among whom friendships had begun to develop; from the odd remarks or comments made by people who served at the check-out or anybody else whom I might meet only once but gave me something to think about; and from the local newspapers and news-sheets thrust indiscriminatingly through my letter box. With very little

effort on my part a number of things were beginning to become clear. I was struck not so much by the variety of issues open for debate but, not for the first time, by the many forms of disadvantage, oppression and discrimination which people faced; and by their experience of powerlessness and inequality as part of their everyday lives. This wasn't, *viz* Hoggart (1958) a middle-class intellectual's conversion to Marxism by a sudden revelation of the 'working classes' as betrayed and debased, entirely under the control of grinding social and political institutions. After all, within the experience of powerlessness and inequality, today's middle-class suffer alongside the working class. It was much more a revelation of how little I knew of the people themselves and how difficult it would be to interpret anything they might say, think or feel about any subject without a better understanding of who was saying, thinking or feeling in the first place. I had already occupied days filling up numerous sheets of paper with my own agenda, my own interests, my own expressions of what I felt were opportunities for study within Dunfermline. But in terms of where I stood at that time, it was not proving to be a particularly rewarding occupation. Gradually the issue became one of avoiding the construction of a preconceived agenda or the construction of an image of Dunfermline people, to allowing the people to describe themselves. I drew support from the work of other anthropologists, such as Myerhoff, who suggests 'the deliberate avoidance of preconceptions' and 'allowing the group or subject to dictate the form the description ultimately takes' (1979:28). In this way, to see through statements to what the statements really meant, and to see beyond habits and customs to what they really stood for.

Despite this, however, the question of how to observe the lives of the people around continued to trouble me. What went on in the heads of the folk of Fife and how was I to carry out an ethnographic study among people who spent the greater part of their year carrying on their private lives behind closed doors and who might well be less than enthusiastic about revealing these lives to public scrutiny?

There was no obvious answer. In the end the people came to me. That they came in the shape of two of my neighbours, both older women, requiring my assistance to remove two brilliantly coloured peacocks from their shared garden - escapees from the nearby Pittencrief Park - gained me immediate camaraderie with my subjects and restored my faith in the exotic content of my new abode.

My two neighbours had unwittingly helped to convince me that the time was ripe to alter my field of view. Where to study became my immediate neighbourhood; whom to study became the old. I was not sure what aspects of the lives of the old I wished to study

I was simply aware that it was the old with whom I wished to interact. So, added to working-class and Fife culture came the perspective of old age.

Anthropological studies within Fife and of old age

There are relatively few anthropological studies of cultures which may be described as being our own or similar to our own (Bostyn, 1990; Wight, 1987). There are fewer still which have considered old age in specific populations in the West. For the study of older people in Fife, there existed not only research lacunae in the cultural sense, to do with being in Fife, but also in the domain of age-specific studies. This is hardly surprising given the dearth of community and ethnographic studies focusing directly on the elderly (Jerrome, 1992:13; Keith, 1979). Although older people, particularly women, comprise an electorally significant proportion of the population Arber and Ginn contend that they continue to remain largely invisible in mainstream sociological research on the family (1991:31). These authors examine a number of reasons for this neglect, and draw attention to a feature of feminist sociology, confirmed by individuals like Woodward (1995), which is its failure to address the position of older people, either in the private domain of the family or in studies of social stratification. As a number of writers (de Beauvoir, 1970:12; Elder, 1977; Skeet, 1983; Spencer 1990:2; Stearns, 1977:7; Turner, 1995:258) have declared, old age is an essential dimension of human existence too often neglected. This intrigued rather than repelled; for, like dogs that do not bark in the night, there may be more that emerges from why they don't than why they do.

Because of the relative sparsity of the literature the exceptions, those studies which have paid attention to old age peer groups stand out visibly. Among these are Okely's studies of older women in 'communities' in France (1990; 1994); Dawsonís study of mining communities in northern England (1990); and work by Francis (1984); Hazan (1980; 1990; 1994); Hockey, (1990); Jerrome (1992); Keith, (1977; 1980a); Myerhoff (1979); Straw (1986) and Townsend (1957; 1963).

Research studies of ordinary people's everyday lives in the full variety of contexts provide an enormously important reservoir of descriptive and evaluative social experience from which a greater understanding of sociological and anthropological issues has been drawn. Barbara Myerhoff's celebrated ethnographic account *Number Our Days* (Myerhoff, 1979), to which I make frequent reference throughout this study, deserves special mention. Her study was of elderly East European Jewish immigrants who formed the membership of a day centre in a Californian coastal

resort. These people lived in considerable poverty and spoke Yiddish as their first language. The culture in which they participated was that of *Yiddishkeit*, 'a moral and ethical Judaism which was essentially secular despite its inextricable relationship to religious practice' (Cohen 1994:101). The individuality of these Jewish people consisted in audibility and visibility and also 'in the demonstration of continuity with their past lives in which their identities rested on the more secure bases of occupation, parenting and place and family of origin' (Cohen 1994:102).

In some respects these elderly could not be further removed, in cultural terms, from the elderly studied here. Yet the concern for continuity shown by the Fife elderly in my study echoes Myerhoff's revelations. It is a concern for dealing with the problem faced by the self when facing up to 'modernity' - in all its guises. In Myerhoff's study the self responds to 'modernity' by ëits authorship of a narrative project which connects the past and future lives of the individualí (Cohen 1994:102). Thus it is not simply a passive reaction to the institutional regime of modern society. The elderly Jews are the authors of their own selfhood: through their creativity, adaptability and syncretistic skills, an alternative institutional order is contrived (Cohen 1994:103).

Myerhoff's study is one to which I am indebted. The insight with which she transforms otherwise apparently ordinary conversations and events into the extraordinary, has the power to stir the imagination well beyond the normal 'processing' of fieldwork into the written form. Her study brims with perspectives, insights and rich and imaginative discoveries that helped me to make sense of my many and varied encounters with the elderly. Her use of narrative and dialogue is exemplary in showing the process through which the elderly Jews among whom she worked wove meaning and identity out of their memories and experiences.

Doing ethnography among 'ourselves'

The question of why an unresearched people, particularly those existing on the proverbial doorstep, should remain unresearched, is something of a conundrum. Perhaps a part of all of us believes that 'the people next door' lead lives which are not particularly different from our own. If it is impossible to see anything distinctive about local practices, can one then focus on what is distinctive about them? This is an important point to resolve because, as Condry (1983:118) points out, without this implicit distinction 'the notion of the translation of culture becomes problematic'.

The obvious resolution for most anthropologists is to place themselves in a cross-cultural encounter, seeking to form long-term links with others across the cultural

divide. In a foreign country among people speaking a different language, this is not so hard a position to achieve. But what about Scotland? I am an incomer to Scotland but am I able to legitimately assume that a sort of cultural divide exists between myself and those who were born here? Is the local culture not very similar to my own? In the supposedly more cosmopolitan lowland and urban areas of Scotland, surely it is legitimate to claim a cultural sameness, albeit limited?

To the extent that I can judge the matter objectively my attempts to answer these questions presented some obvious risks of misinterpretation. To begin with, what was 'the local culture'? What, for that matter, was Scottish culture? A mixture of 'common sense and sentimentality, of social realism and airy-fairy, of Gaelic piety and Lowland mawkishness?' (White, 1991:11) Was it porridge and haggis, tartan and whisky, bagpipes and the *Sunday Post*? Surely not. But if it wasn't that, then what was it?

I had recently completed some fieldwork in the former mining region of Central Scotland, between Edinburgh and Glasgow (Clark and Johnson, 1993), and it had been obvious to both the people living there and to myself that something of a cultural divide existed between us. The argument of whether or not boundaries existed did not, it seemed to me, present itself; for, whatever one chose to call them, boundaries there most certainly were.

In Fife the possibility of a cultural divide seemed to be supported by the old adage 'Bid farewell to Scotland and cross to Fife' (Pride, 1990). A sense of isolation and difference was implicit in the reputation of Fife's inhabitants for being 'leerie' or sly, reserved and unapproachable. Certainly geographical boundaries played a part. Before the advent of the Forth Railway Bridge in 1879 you needed, unless you came in from the west, more than 'a lang spoon tae sup wi a Fifer'. You needed a boat.

I expected boundaries to exist between myself and Fifers and, indeed, it would have concerned me had I felt that I had insufficient 'outsider' characteristics to qualify me for participant observation. This is not to say, however, that such concern is universal: others may use their 'cultural sameness' to legitimise their ethnographic studies. I suspect, however, that 'cultural sameness', to any extent, is a rare thing in Scotland. Indeed, if one travels to different parts of Scotland it is hard to avoid the impression of being immersed in an endless forest of culture, full of the most minute detail, all of it different and yet of all of it somehow similar; a great mass of people with their own ways of doing things, their own habits, their own beliefs and customs.

The ambiguity of such an impression can lead to both right and wrong conclusions: right in that it indicates the multitudinous and infinitely detailed character of the Scottish people, and, at the same time, the sense of an immense uniformity, of always being part of a culture that is uniquely Scottish even if one cannot define what that means. But it is wrong if it leads us to construct an image of Scottish people, regardless of place of origin, only from adding together the variety of statistics given that claim this percentage think this or do not think that, or this number are pro-devolution and that number are against. It is in these former denouements, often euphemisms for ignorance, that one may legitimately believe that there are broad sweeps of Scottish cultural practices which are regarded as lacking distinctive qualities. The belief that some anthropologists hide 'behind the notion of boundaries', as Condry (1983:121) somewhat disparagingly puts it, seems to me to imply that it is legitimate to elevate the role of ignorance. This is surely partly why we talk of 'Scottish culture' and 'Gaelic culture' but, simply because we know very little about it, not of 'Fife culture' or 'Dumfries culture'

Condry (1983) notes that most anthropological fieldworkers in Scotland seem to have found it difficult to provide detailed ethnographic descriptions. Myerhoff (1979:18) agrees that working with one's own society is 'much more difficult' than working outside one's own ethnic and familial heritage. Yet, for many anthropologists this is their 'third birth' (Myerhoff, 1979:ix), spoken of by the distinguished Indian anthropologist M. N. Srinivas. When, having becoming familiarised with some alien culture, we once again turn our attention towards our native land, we find that the familiar has become 'exoticised' (Myerhoff, 1979:ix) and see this with new eyes. Admittedly, I could hardly claim to have had my 'second birth' because I did not first undertake fieldwork in a far away place. Yet I had spent many years in far away places, among other cultures, and even though I did not spend my time there as an anthropologist this did not prevent me from familiarising myself and understanding the rules and vocabulary of those other cultures.

On top of all this I never escaped self-consciousness. Anthropologists have been nudged into a deeper awareness of the notion of self-consciousness by academics such as Cohen. His trajectory which questions 'the conferment of a social identity' that 'minimises the mystery of the self, either by concealing it, or by making the self in a social image, or both' (Cohen, 1993:72) says much for the broad conclusions we may unquestioningly accept about own society's culture. But this is an old debate. The core contradiction of sociology - the tension between the subjectively creative individual

human being acting upon the world and the objectively given social structure constraining it - is central to our everyday experience. Self-consciousness, the capacity for reflection which means that we can 'no longer render the self as a mere replicate of society or social group' (Cohen, 1993:58), addresses 'the mystery of the self' (Cohen, 1993:56) through the inclusion of personal meanings and experience. This was recognised long ago by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918-20) in their monumental study of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*; also by Durand (1904), living among Fife miners; Whyte's (1955) *Street Corner Society* and Lewis's (1961; 1967) studies among Puerto Rican families. In their concern to pay tribute to individual diversity, subjectivity and creativity these accounts provided insights which it is hard to imagine would have emerged in other ways.

The hegemony of language

It is said that to do ethnography it is necessary to begin with a serious study of the way people talk (Bell and Newby, 1977; Berger and Berger, 1976; Bradley and Lowe, 1984; Carroll, 1980; Moore, 1977). In a 'native' culture, it may well be considered that the researcher has definite advantages. Bradley and Lowe state quite rationally that 'in the study of indigenous cultures, the ethnographer, as a native speaker, is much better equipped to penetrate the conceptual and idiomatic subtleties of linguistic communities' (1984:8). I was not so sure, however, that it was always as easy as they suggest.

Fifers own not just another dialect but another vocabulary with important dialect shifts and semantic differences. Their language was one with which I was unfamiliar. As an English woman in Fife, I was not a native speaker. My speech identified me as non-native, often with the result that people modified their response. I became rapidly aware of the distinct cultural boundary between myself and other 'locals' which had less to do with my research and more to do with being English and 'middle-class'.

Accent, for example, a central focus for the celebration of identity, fuelled and hosted a range of negative stereotypes of which local Fifers, like other Scots, were not unaware. They countered this with a robust response, systematically grasping these negative stereotypical images of themselves, and explaining them as misunderstood and the misunderstanding to be based on ignorance.

Metaphor was a basic part of the language - saying things with a memorable flourish, as in: 'shoes sae narrow they could kick the ee of a robin'; 'ye've mair faces than the

galla toun clock'; 'keep yer ain seagurs fur yer ain seamews' [1]. The use of metaphor in the Scots language would form a study in its own right. It is not a major source of study here but I have sought to draw attention to this richly poetic undercurrent by deliberately choosing to use metaphor as a basic part of the writing of this thesis.

The articulation of culture and experience is not solely through the medium of language, as Spradley (1979) seems to claim. The hegemony of language over other forms of communication may deflect attention from less obvious means, particularly among the elderly. Within the range of different forms of communication, silences and absences may play a role in the interpretation of lives. This is particularly significant where language is 'reduced' to the briefest of utterances, monosyllabic replies and aphorisms and epithets which seem trivial and unimpressive. There was thus this continuous requirement on my part to be sensitive to the entire range of personal resources on display, understanding that the *sotto voce* may well provide the only handhold into the world being studied.

Furthermore, as Okely (1994) makes clear, we draw on all the senses - touch, taste, sight, sound and smell. The essence of social interactions is exchange. We signal our way through life and, from one point of view, society and community are an endless exchange of messages invested with meaning. Language is only one of a range of signifying systems which may also comprise images, gestures, social behaviour and clothes. These are all socially invested with meaning. They provide familiarity and, as Belsey (1980) points out, meaning is constructed by reproducing what is familiar.

Practical aspects of fieldwork

I moved to Fife in January 1993, the field-work materially relevant to this study taking place between September of that year and January 1995.

At first, in the context of the study, it seemed important to try and define exactly which older people and where. Some lived in neighbourhood groups among a proportionately high percentage of other older people: the neighbourhoods might therefore be described, in terms of life-stage, as relatively homogeneous. Others lived in nursing homes, geriatric wards of hospitals or sheltered housing. The question of the validity of treating collectivities of older people as 'communities' remained open. In such a wide vicinity, comprising Dunfermline and its outlying villages, there were whole groups

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1 mind your own business

of people whose lives I could not hope to touch on during one year of field work. Neither was I able to do what many anthropologists do - which is to move in on their study group. I did the next best thing which was to live adjacent to them. The older people of Windsor Court and those living in the immediate vicinity were the first to attract my attention. I lived in a small first-floor flat, opposite this sheltered housing scheme. Built at the turn of the century the flat overlooked the central Co-operative Funeral Services with a coffin and head stone service at the end of the street. I was not short of the outward manifestations of the ultimate end to old age. Surrounded on all sides by older neighbours, before the first two months had passed we knew each other's names; exchanged goods from our gardens; took in each other's washing; chatted over the garden wall and engaged in a number of other neighbourly activities.

As a regular participant at Windsor Court events the reason for my attendance was sometimes forgotten or misunderstood. On one occasion at a weekly Lunch Club, for example, one of the Social Work Managers paid a visit. The intention of his visit was to interview one of the volunteer workers to make a rough assessment of her progress. One of the club's participants, a woman in her seventieth year, beckoned me over and whispered. "Surely, if ye hae a word wi the Manager, he'll put in a guid word fur ye an' ye may find yersel wi a paid job..... better than this, anywey!"

My present occupation clearly did not represent 'real' work. Furthermore, my age and behaviour did not fit the standard view of studenthood. I was 'working hard' when I was selling raffle tickets or handing round cups of tea, not when I was merely engaging in conversation.

Similarly, at their fortnightly 'class' at Thornton, the railwaymen found it difficult to produce a verbal explanation for my presence. Hence, during my second month of attendance, my work was described in the following fashion.

"Welcome! An' tae those that dinna recognise the girl - Ah'll use the word 'girl' - sittin', eh, on ma richt here - that's Jenny Johnson, who's bin at the last twa meetin's. An' she's here jest tae jot doon some information, an' it's somethin' tae dae wi her education fur this new job that she's gaun fur. An' mebbe she'll hae yin or twa questions tae ask efter we get nearer the end o' the meetin'."

Happily, the theme of my new job was never pursued; nor was there any need for me to explain myself any further.

One of the results of the confusion surrounding my presence (despite attempts on my part to try and clarify my position) was that there was no immediate requirement to prove my credentials as a researcher: my subjects did not expect me to greet them with a clipboard and questionnaire and all the other paraphernalia which the layperson might expect to accompany a systematic research enquiry today. This was something of a relief. Formal research methods such as questionnaires, experiments, attitude scales and perusal of literature give a form and order to the world which it frequently does not have. They seek consistency in subjects' responses when subjects' lives are often inconsistent. Furthermore, as I will seek to show throughout this study, my interest lay in marginal perspectives, and these alone are usually quite impossible to elicit from even-handed sampling and general statistical groupings. Like Goffman (1953), I found that even had the culture been the kind where it is possible for outsiders to ask odd sorts of questions, I still could not have employed questionnaires because I did not know enough about the social context and people's lives to ask the right questions. In order to learn what the right questions were I had, to a degree, to be taken for granted by them. And, in order to help individuals feel comfortable with my research objectives, their trust had first to be won.

There are no easy routes to establishing trust and I found the process of establishing the trust and confidence of my informants, and entering their social world, to be painfully slow, much slower than I had envisaged. Emergent conversations also depended on such factors as the emotional state of the individual - whether or not she was in a 'mood' that day - and on their physical capacity. Endemic illnesses and ailments often over-rode all other considerations; it was not unusual for a resident to inform me that she had decided to come to the coffee morning, for example, to take her mind off her pain or physical distress, but that she felt too unwell to talk. At the end of this spectrum were those participants who took particularly strong pain-killers or who were under such a range of medication that they found themselves unable to remain awake during social events.

The result was, after several months of participating with residents at Windsor Court, I felt that I hardly 'knew' them at all. Indeed, so superficial were my relationships that I wrote in my diary: 'I have been with these women now for six months. But I hardly know them. It's as if there is nothing to their lives beyond what's on show in the coffee morning and at the group lunches. There is small talk and gossip in abundance. What's on TV seems to be the subject of greatest interest.'

I thought I was faced with a real problem. That the residents were not in the habit of drawing attention to themselves or talking about their lives did not bode well for ethnographic content. Talk came of course. But it rarely seemed to progress beyond illness, discomfort, grandchildren, holidays or best grocery bargains in the shops. This was the lifeworld (Tuan, 1974) into which I had entered: the world of the taken-for-granted pattern and context of everyday life. For months I existed on a very skimpy diet of apparent trivialities and small talk that formed the daily courses partaken by the men and women. This is not meant in any pejorative sense. It is just that at the beginning of my field work it seemed important to me that my data consisted of more than 'bits and pieces' of writing. I lacked the confidence that I could later on knit together all these 'bits and pieces' into something of scholarship. It took me a long time to find a satisfactory shape for my work and an even longer time to come to terms with the new lifeworld I had entered. For just around the corner from each trivial task, big things could happen almost unnoticed; powerful laws moving in strange conjunction with small accidents.

Of course, the shape of my new lifeworld seemed enhanced in situations where I was able to be alone with an individual and enter into one-to-one dialogue, whether during a group activity or in an individual's home. I could not help feeling, however, that the individuals who agreed to see me alone were the same who, in a group situation, would be more likely to volunteer their friendship or interest. Despite some initial enthusiasm for home visits from individuals within Windsor Court, very few individuals within any research setting volunteered their time and, for the most part, the initiative lay with me. I often felt that it was necessary for me to repay the cost of showing an interest in my study and I felt a certain compulsion to offer myself, over time, as a human receptacle - a confidante - for individuals' feelings about their health, their family, their money problems or any other subjects they felt inclined to raise. On the one hand this emotional involvement presented considerable dangers and I constantly had to resist the impulse to make more of people and situations than my conscious understanding of the material gave me grounds for. On the other hand, this was the way in which a basis for friendship, mutual respect and trust came into being despite the methodological and conceptual challenges it aroused.

Participant observation

With its emphasis on subjectivity and total immersion in the lives of a research population, participant observation has both advantages and disadvantages. There are many degrees of participation, but the central feature is the researcher's personal

involvement in the research setting as a means to understanding it (Keith, 1980b). This, as Turnbull argues, demands more than objective study. It demands emotional and intellectual involvement in another culture (1990:51). Indeed, Turnbull's argument is based on what he sees as 'a major weakness of anthropology' (1990:51), namely that anthropologists do not enter the field fully enough. 'The superficiality of our understanding of other cultures (as of our own) is directly proportional to the superficiality of our participation in that culture' (1990:51).

Jerrome (1992:26) has outlined the principal ways in which participant observation can be seen to be valuable for the study of ageing. It allows the field-worker, the stranger, to gain an insider's view, to be made familiar and to be recognised as a part of the on-going activities of the lives of the subjects. As a means of gaining insight into the qualitative aspects of ageing, and in understanding the meanings attached to events and relationships among the old, it is highly appropriate.

There were other advantages too: mistakes could actually end up yielding dividends. Jerrome writes that 'the tendency in research involving participant observation to break social rules on immediate entry to the field of study - almost inevitable given the researcher's initial state of ignorance - is a crucial learning experience and yields valuable material' (1992:29).

For all its advantages, however, participant observation could not tell me what to do with what it brought about. Group dynamics, social expressions and emergent relationships had to be observed in aggregate; they did not emerge from the totting up of individual reports. Although there were many times when I wished they would.

By far the greatest proportion of my data consisted of conversations, group meetings and group and individual oral histories. When it came to 'processing' all this ethnographic material I oscillated between representing this material in my own words, in the form of a sort of paraphrased text, and setting it down as direct speech. It was often difficult to translate this direct speech without losing its power. In many instances I found it quite inconceivable to imagine rendering the speech of particular individuals 'in my own words' because this would have drastically obscured the fullness and distinctiveness of what was being said and who was saying it. I wanted these people to be alive - to breathe through the text - and the only way I felt this was possible was to let the text itself speak. Much of the speech has therefore been incorporated verbatim, albeit heavily edited and selected. Much of what might be considered as 'the more significant' speech elements are embedded in 'trivia'. I have

often used so-called conversational trivia: the flotsam and jetsam of words, unfinished sentences, conversational paraphernalia that came my way to set the scene. In itself, some of this vocalisation held little content, but this general social commentary, always original and vital, acted like a sort of social glue without which the whole picture I was trying to present would have become unstuck.

Epistemological and ideological aspects of fieldwork

Understanding old age

Few textbooks espouse the 'realities' of old age from the point of view of those who are already old. What for us may be the normal mode of perceiving old age is only one particular personal construction of reality. For the ethnographer it is important to be clear about this because all ethnographers are positioned subjects and grasp certain phenomena better than others (Hastrup, 1992:119). The position, Hastrup (1992:19) argues, is defined by age, gender and outsider's status, but it also refers to the ethnographer's lived experience which enables or inhibits particular kinds of insight.

Questions of understanding old age were questions of exploring something essentially hidden from me, with particular implications for the insight I was able to bring. In exploring the nature of this hiddenness, I was made constantly aware of my own identity, my own self, my own attitudes and my own stereotypical images of old age. Because ethnographic research, where the researcher may 'become' like her subjects, implies seeing ones personal self in them, the task of seeing oneself as old involves, among other things, addressing all one's own fears, prejudices and attitudes towards this period of life.

I had no idea that I had embarked on such a perilous journey for there are two aspects which make the study of working with the elderly within one's own society much more difficult than engaging with 'others' within some other foreign culture. There is not just the question of working with one's own society which carries with it its own pitfalls. 'Identifying with the 'Other' - Indians, Chicanos, if one is Anglo, blacks if one is white, males if one is female - is an act of imagination, a means for discovering what one is not and will never be. Identifying with what one is now and will be some day is quite a different process' (Myerhoff, 1979:18).

Whilst, arguably, it might be easier to identify with an adolescent, because one has, generally speaking, 'been there', only the old have experienced old age. To what extent would my lack of experience of old age create for me difficulties in identifying

with their lived experiences? How was I to check out any insights gained with the actual experience of older people to ensure that my conclusions were not simply the product of a fertile imagination (Biggs, 1991)? Should I do what Myerhoff had done and try emulating some of the physical problems of the elderly....'by wearing stiff garden gloves to perform ordinary tasks, taking off my glasses and plugging my ears, slowing down my movements and sometimes by wearing the heaviest shoes I could find' (1979:18)?

I did not know the answers to these questions. As several writers have commented (Biggs, 1993; Comfort, 1977; Palmore, 1977; Prunchno and Symer, 1983) there is a widespread ignorance on the true nature of the ageing process. Biggs (1993:6) asserts that younger people's conceptions of older age have to do with maintaining a positive self-image by contrasting it with that of the older person, this being related to a fear of future personal disintegration. Since social policy, relations with agencies that provide care, and images of later life largely depend upon decisions made by the not-yet-old, he rightly questions whether the dominant discourse on old age prevailing today has much in common with the lived experience of older people. It certainly leads to extensive implications for whether the requirements of older people are met.

In our society, we are increasingly cut off from the elderly. They are in our midst, but often not visibly so, and we lack or, perhaps, avoid regular access to role models of old age. In fact, I brought to this study an unintended range of previous contacts with old people in my life - people I had visited over a period of years, and my own grandparents - and, perhaps, as argued by Knox *et al.* (1986), the quality of contact with these older people was important in determining the views I held. My own conscience would not, however, permit me an amnesty from questioning my own purpose in the research. I had not approached my subjects with the idea that it was essential to learn about being old. Indeed, the whole concept of learning to be old seemed redundant in the light of arguments proposed by Kaufman (1986:165) against any socialisation *to* old age and against self-concepts based on socialisation to particular roles that might be acquired *in* old age. Yet, I was left with an uneasy feeling that perhaps it might just be that learning to be old is as essential for adulthood as, for a child, is learning to be adult. I would be old one day. Here I was being given the opportunity to anticipate, rehearse and contemplate my own future.

Inter-generational communication

The significance of such basic attributes as age and gender in social life varies not simply from culture to culture, but between generations within the 'same' culture. I was aware that my study provided a rich arena not simply for cultural misunderstanding but for inter-generational misunderstanding too. Kertzer (1983:125-49) recognises 'generation' as a 'sociological problem', whilst Giles and Coupland (1991) talk of 'generational cultures' that exist in the divergent communication styles of different ages, particularly when little contact occurs between generations. It was clear, at least within both sheltered housing schemes, that encounters with 'younger generations' were limited, often being confined to infrequent visits by children, who might themselves be in their sixties, and grandchildren. My presence was therefore unusual and I was at first conscious of a certain stereotyping when meetings took place, such as the response: "Och, it's nice tae hae a young face roon here".

The age gap between myself and my informants varied from 30 years upwards yet my use of the word 'old' seemed to imply a selected age-cohort of individuals. Biggs (1993:68) states that 'a cohort refers to a group who share certain experiences by virtue of a similar age, in other words, are part of the same generation'. Also Daly writes that 'to be part of a generation is to share in the collective consciousness of a group and to hold a stake in the interests, values and activities that represent the historical and developmental character of that group' (1996:198) In general, I take a catholic stance on the age groups within the rubric 'generation', using the term simply as a tool of classification (Daly, 1996:182). Yet I am not unaware that these were people who had been born not within one particular time span but within several particular time spans. As a woman aged 40, I do not consider myself of the same generation as my nephew, aged 13. Yet, a curious degree of 'sameness' is accorded those who have entered old age so that two different generations are treated by younger people as one and the same.

Perhaps the conflation of generations emerges from the attributing of a quality of relationship to a collectivity of people of which one is not usually a part. It results in a largely unquestioned acknowledgement that old age may encompass 30 years of living, thus blurring, beyond a certain age, distinctions between age generations. As the following quote, extracted from Blythe, illustrates, the old have their own way of looking at this.

> 'When you are ninety-two and you say, "When I was seventy-four", it is almost like saying, "When I was young!"'
>
> A clergyman's widow, quoted in Ronald Blythe's The View in Winter, 1979

Woodward points out that recent debates have placed a considerable strain on the notions of 'identity' and 'difference' (1995:85-6). The concept of conflation of generations grants a certain 'wholeness' to their identity; suffice it to say that this is not a meaning that I wish it to carry here. But neither do I wish it to be constructed in direct opposition to 'difference'. In this study, identity does not preclude difference. Generational identity, *vide* Woodward (1995), entails a difference based on *similarity* that finds its temporal expression in *continuity* and is something explored in a great deal more depth later on.

Old age as a social construct

An important part of any group's temporal map is life-cycle ordering and the constructions placed by society on the maturation process, about the nature of childhood, adulthood and old age. These representations constrain the order the process of ageing through the imposition of bounded categories. Schooling, work and retirement,' writes Biggs (1993:68), 'have ordered life in such a way that people are not only conscious of their stage in life, but also tend to encounter and value contemporaries to the exclusion of other groups.'

Chudacoff (1989) notes that, since the middle of the nineteenth century, Western industrial societies have shown an increasing trend toward peer organisation along age lines. The whole concept of childhood, for example, as a distinct and separate age, with its own formative significance, is a very recent development (Sampson & Sampson, 1985:x), whilst neither adolescence (James, 1986:155) nor 'mid-life' (Hepworth, 1987) are readily defined. All these categories vary greatly according to who is using them, for what purposes and with what sort of environmental surroundings in mind (Philo, 1992:194). Within late twentieth century society the constructions have altered in line with an increase in life expectancy and changing economic circumstances yet the fact remains that it is the experience of socialisation which gives the life-cycle term 'old age' concrete form in everyday life (James, 1986:155).

Is old age, however, *only* socially constructed? The popular view is that it is. Yet its definition must flow from an understanding of the process of construction which is to

do with both the individual self and society (Östör, 1984:281,302). It also has to do with both individual and social memory. Bryan Turner insists that we should not talk about memory without talking about body. Because 'time is inscribed indelibly on our bodies' he writes, 'my body is, so to speak, a walking memory'. Thus 'the inevitability of biological ageing presents important difficulties for the popular view that ageing is simply a social construct' (Turner, 1995:250).

The form that strategies for self-presentation take in old age can shed light both on the social construction of ageing and how it is dealt with by older people. In contemporary Britain, where formal initiation rites to mark and order movement conceptually between categories over time may be institutionally absent, the boundaries and limits to the conceptual classification of 'old age' remain ambiguous (Hareven and Adams, 1982:13; Taylor, 1988:105). It is this ambiguity which permits 'the old', particularly the 'young old', to deny that they are old. Such confusion is a function of the ways in which attempts are made to draw boundaries to old age, to contain and control old people as a group apart (Östör, 1984:283). Too old to be in paid employment; too young to be described as 'very elderly', many of the old do not belong easily to a category. What boundaries to old age *do* exist are primarily boundaries of exclusion rather than inclusion. They define what the old are not.

Age meanings are thus products of social and cultural processes, which, write Hendricks and Hendricks 'can only be seen through metaphor-lensed spectacles, for it is through a culture's metaphors that ageing is given social shape' (1977). The 'concrete experience' of ageing is itself metaphorical and, suggest Lakoff and Johnson (1980:104), 'most intensely stimulated and generated by rituals which dramatise culturally vivid metaphors'.

The place of performance ritual

The myths and rituals we take very seriously when we encounter them in other cultures have been treated as ephemeral when discovered closer to home (Gillis, 1996:xvii). They are so embedded in our everyday lives that they remain virtually invisible or, when detected, are put in the category of folklore, primordial and timeless. Turner suggests that there is an ontological quest for circumscribed space and secure time (1995:249) and, for this reason, argues Giddens (1991:43-56) human beings create everyday routines and rituals to provide a framework of ontological security.

Bryan Turner makes reference to rituals like funerals, marriages, etc. as 'an essential feature of the ordering and featuring of what is necessarily a precarious and problematic environment, because humans are aware of its precarious nature' (1995:248). These ideas about the ontological rootedness of religion in human life were worked out in contemporary sociology with great insight by Peter Berger in *The Sacred Canopy* (1969). This perfectly captures the essence of the philosophical anthropology of ritualized practices with respect to our unfinished natures, namely that we cover ourselves in a canopy to ward off chaos, disaster and death.

Of the myriad theoretical descriptions of ritual Catherine Bell argues that it is possible to demonstrate three basic structural patterns. The first is the differentiation of ritual as what is done from what is thought; the second, the portrayal of ritual as a mechanism for integrating thought and action (Bell, 1992:20). These two patterns, both of which are seen operating in the context of my thesis, are demonstrated in several different approaches to ritual (for example, Durkheim, 1971; Tambiah, 1970; Turner, 1969). A third pattern is revealed by Geertz (1973a) and I briefly elaborate it here because of the implications for the way in which I have drawn upon ritual in this study. Geertz explains that, in cultural performances such as religious ritual, ritual action gives expression to thought; in so doing, it integrates thought and action (1973a:113). In relating this to the differences between the way in which participants themselves experience the ritual and outsiders (such as myself) observe it, he sets up a third permutation of the thought-action dichotomy. That is, ritual participants act, whereas those observing them, think (Bell, 1992:28). In the ritual act, thought and action are fused for the participants and this yields meaning. But, for myself, meaning is derived only insofar as I can perceive in ritual 'the true basis of its meaningfulness for the ritual participants' (Bell, 1992:28). In this way, Bell argues that 'a cultural focus on ritual activity renders the rite a veritable window on the most important processes of cultural life' (Bell, 1992:28). This conclusion seems also to be reached by Douglas, who writes that ritual transmits culture, culture being 'the public, standardised values of a community....a positive pattern in which ideas and values are tidily ordered' (1966:38-9). The way in which ritual does this is as a particular form of communication, involving 'instituted signs' and 'symbolic action' taking place in the right order (Douglas, 1966:38).

Ritual deals also with adjustment. Every change that occurs in the life course requires adjustment. The major transitions of taking up an adult role, beginning work, marriage, childbirth and moving house require particular major adjustments. Any

one of these may foster deep feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, impotence and disorder and it is probable that old age, which requires a capacity to adjust to new changes in life: loss of work role, loss of spouse, decreased income and increasing physical frailty, may lead to a heightening of such feelings. Whilst some of these changes can be viewed in a positive light - freedom, independence, more leisure - rather more contribute to the perception that old age is a particularly difficult period of life (Coleman, 1993a:68-96; Coleman, Bond and Peace, 1993:12-13). This observation is supported with evidence for high levels of depression and loneliness; together with the commonly held view that family relationships lack the strength they had in the past and that this results in the greater isolation of older people (Coleman, Bond and Peace, 1993:13). Myerhoff (1984:305) has written about the stabilising effects of ritual during such periods of uncertainty. It carries with it 'a basic message about continuity, predictability and tradition. New events are connected to preceding ones, incorporated into a stream of precedents so that they are recognised as growing out of tradition and experience.' (Myerhoff, 1984:306).

Myerhoff also argues that situations promoting invisibility seem to call for symbolic and ritual elaboration. 'People and collectivities that have no natural heirs or witnesses to validate their individual claims to have lived a worthy life....create a sharp need for the dramatisation and ritual display of their own version of themselves and their histories' (Myerhoff, 1984:317). Yet, she observes that, paradoxically, the degree of social and ceremonial specificity surrounding old age is generally less than that accorded earlier phases in the life cycle (Myerhoff, 1984:308).

This opens up a conundrum. For if, as Coleman (1993b:98) argues, the capacity to adjust to life's changes does not appear to be diminished in later life but is rather enhanced, this would imply *more* rather than less ritual. One is thus left to ask whether there is, on the one hand, something else that enhances the capacity to adjust to life's changes in later life; or, on the other, something about the nature of ritual itself in later life that enhances this capacity.

The work of Fried and Fried (1980:268) claims that there is no record of societies up to the present that have existed without ritual, 'hence, if such existed they did not survive'. Myerhoff (1979:31) argues that this implies that rituals play an adaptive role in the process of the cultural evolution of society, and by implication in the well-being of its individuals. If, therefore, ritual signposts, ceremonies and symbols are absent during that period of life marked, at its start, by retirement, and at its end, by a funeral, one may question from where the elderly derive these markers that play such

a significant and adaptive role for them? It is conceivable - and this is not an answer but, simply, a thought - that the absence of public social rituals during later life brings into greater relief the small group or private rituals - coffee mornings, shopping, clothes-washing and so on - of older people. Certainly, when death is imminent, the sorting and ordering of one's memories, the putting of one's house in order, may be regarded as a private ritualistic act, the imposition of individual purposeful order on the colourful and amorphous shape of the life that has been: a ritual event that invites reflexivity. But often, as I will show, the ethnographic evidence seems to persuade the reader that ritual discourages reflection and thoughtfulness - that the coffee mornings, for example, were agents of conformity, impressing upon its participants co-ordination and formality, consisting of a number of detailed work routines - seating arrangements, tea and coffee, conversational topics, raffles, prizes and so on. This is the power of the ritual: the ambiguity and the complexity of its relation to reflexive knowledge. For ritual, we are told by Myerhoff, 'deals with unconscious knowledge, and its work and teachings cannot be adequately assessed only in terms of what people may tell us about their impact and purpose' (1984:317).

Life cycle rituals

All societies tend to mark the transition from one significant life phase to another in a 'ritualistic' way, setting boundaries around periods of social time, whether these are daily activities, weekly events or life roles. This is a method of ordering, which as Moore (1963:101) writes 'involves marking off some kinds of units'.

Rituals that *do* mark transitions in the life cycle - rites of passage - might, as emphasised earlier, be expected to provide insights concerning the interplay between ageing, ritual and identity (Erikson, 1980; 1983). Thus, for example, numerous ceremonies and processes of socialisation surround the events of birth, reproduction and death.

In his now classic study of life cycle rituals, Van Gennep (1908) first outlined the three-part progression through which these ceremonies proceeded as they moved initiates through transitional states involving permanent transformations in status and age. Separation rites first segregate, removing the individual from his or her previous social position in an enactment of symbolic death (Phase I, separation), before isolating and confining them to each other's company as marginal beings, on the threshold between categories (Phase II, liminality), followed by 'rebirth' into full membership within the community (Phase III, reaggregation). Leach (1961:135)

characterises the stages in rites of passage by 'formality' (separation); 'role reversal' (transition) and 'masquerade' (incorporation). The symbols employed tend to signify movement: journeys, exits and entrances, boundaries and thresholds. Van Gennep describes the individual whose status is changing as 'sacred' in relation to those who remain; ritual is seen as necessary to reduce the disruptive effect of such change and to incorporate the individual back into the routines of 'normal life'.

There has been a tendency among anthropologists to focus on the middle phases of 'marginality' and 'liminality' (from the Latin *limen* meaning 'threshold') which is important from the point of view of old age since old age itself is often regarded as a liminal phase of existence - a role extended through the lifetime allotted to the old (Myerhoff, 1984:310). Turner has elaborated Van Gennep's early study by focusing on the liminal phase describing it as involving 'levelling' or 'communitas' as the initiates recognise the 'essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society' (Turner, 1969:32). In chapter 11 this process is distinguished as taking place within a specific but transitory performance. Yet at the same time the performance seems to suggest and confirm the existence of a para-ritual - the transformative ritual of old age itself which continuously and with ineradicable momentum clarifies the fundamental categories of old and young. The transformative ritual is the place where interaction between culture, humanity and biology is most clearly observed (Myerhoff, 1984:307), at the intersection of our existence as natural and cultural beings - conditions that are inseparable.

Throughout this study I argue that performance ritual is not simply limited to those activities accompanying life-cycle changes (leading to rites of transition), but is a broader concept which includes what may be described as stylised or formalised everyday activities (leading to rites of identity).

Given ever lengthening life expectations, the lack of co-ordination between biology and ritual (between nature and culture) among the old in industrialised nations, reflects our conflicting attitudes towards old age. In our society old age is particularly dominated by social rather than physiological criteria. The 'old' retire at a specific legal moment, chronologically determined rather than functionally determined. After retiral they are no longer 'economically productive' and, regardless of individual attributes, sharply divided from other fully participating 'productive' members of society. Here, Myerhoff writes 'nature and culture stand at great remove from each other' (1984:308). She also makes the point, noted above, that given the growing duration of later life in absolute terms it is astonishing that so few rituals

punctuate the latter half of the life cycle. The immense category of 'old age' may last for three decades or more, but is divided only on the chronological basis of 'young old', 60-75, and the 'old old' - over 75 (Taylor, 1988). Of course, the imprecision of the boundary of old age enhances its capacity to retain many and diverse meanings but these two phases are largely distinctive only in that they are socially featureless and goal-less. The lack of rituals may result directly from the loss of a sense of a cycle of life. Perhaps Claydon (1976) is correct in concluding that this loss is part of the divided self of man living in industrialised society today. The machine, rather than the plant, has become a rival metaphor for the way in which we perceive the cycle of life. This is a universal insight. Thompson describes this 'new foundation metaphor' as mechanical rather than organicist, reflecting the tendency of commodity production 'to fragment the organic unity between person, land and produce'. This 'new and increasingly intrusive metaphor is premised on a perception of people as cogs in a great machine rather than as plants that grow as everything else in nature. It emphasises the honing and fashioning of bodies over self-cultivation and growth, and the assembly line over the patriline (1990:117)

The pivotal aspect is the conception of life as a career (Myerhoff and Simic, 1978) - which brings me to a further point. When we pay attention to our membership of the natural world, the familiarity and reassurance of the timelessness of nature's closed circle of generation and decay contrasts distinctly with the linear scale along which humankind in Western society measures its own mortality (Bostyn, 1990). This is significant because ecological processes would never be regarded as anything other than cyclical. Old age in the ecosystem is the richest and most fertile stage providing the basis for the newly born. Sustainability would be impossible without the wealth created by age. Indeed in an ecosystem context, sustainability is all about creating and retaining old age. Thus does humankind deny itself. As Erikson concludes, in a statement that has far-reaching consequences for professional and lay considerations of old age: 'Western psychology has avoided looking at the range of the whole cycle...of individual life coming to a conclusion....Any span of life lived without vigorous meaning - whether at the beginning, in the middle or at the end - endangers the sense of life and the meaning of death' (1963:265).

Concluding comments

One of the singularly most difficult problems I encountered in my research was that of getting started. This derived from the assumption that I had a number of objectives or, at least, questions to answer; that a 'field' existed and that I knew where this 'field'

lay. Many writings on field research in the social sciences suggest that this is a common assumption (Bell & Newby, 1977; Burgess, 1982; Douglas, 1976; Lofland, 1971; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973).

Once I had come to a realisation that these elements were not so crucial after all, the study began to progress. In understanding that old age is based on an illusion - an assumed and uninterpreted universal (Östör, 1984:282) - my research approach could not be anything other than open, eclectic and perhaps indefinable. Interpretation was left to depend not on theory but on judgement. I had to learn to see things in context, to be sensitive to motivation and to value; and at the same time to recognise that my own values infiltrated the work. In all this, how I went about the study and the backbone theme that developed became inseparable from the contribution that anthropology perhaps best makes, which is the consideration of the universal and the particular - tacking back and forth, stressing the universality of being human but realising that only in particular forms, men and women living in particular societies, is this experience embodied for all of us (Östör, 1984:282).

The method, the content and the contribution of anthropology to this study command the same themes: the tension between the general and the particular; between society and selfhood; between old age and the living, thinking emotional being; between ritual and self-consciousness. While being aware of broader canvasses, the essence throughout has been to provide an appreciation of subjective diversity rather than to highlight the general characteristics and to lose the illuminating diversity of which it is comprised.

Chapter 3

Transition to the sheltered homes

Windsor Court and Phillip House

Introduction

The use of Windsor Court and Phillip House as my initial research settings provided a suitable social mix and age range whilst at the same time providing the arenas and the means by which I could become involved. As the research progressed, however, I was drawn into participation in the lives of older people in a considerably wider range of settings than those confined to particular types of housing complexes. These included the clients of a Pensioners' Welfare Centre in Kincardine; Fife Walking Club and the Railwaymen's Oral History Group at Thornton. As I explained in the introduction, I have limited the study to four groups of people: the residents of Windsor Court, those of Phillip House; the participants of a Lunch Club and the railwaymen. Specific details of the two latter settings are provided in following chapters. The central themes of this chapter, however, relate to the sheltered homes and my initial approaches within them.

Sheltered housing in Dunfermline District

Sheltered Housing forms part of the growing range of housing available primarily for elderly people. Windsor Court and Phillip House were sheltered housing complexes, that is, 'housing which has been purpose-built or purpose-converted primarily for elderly people; a scheme consisting of grouped independent accommodation linked to a warden by an alarm system' (Fennell, 1987:1). While housing such as residential homes for the elderly and hospital wards are recognised implicitly as places where the frequent companion of old age, illness, is pre-eminent and where death is a frequent occurrence, sheltered housing is regarded as a closer approximation to living in oneís own home and is thus further removed from the ideas embodied by these other institutions.

In 1994 there were 16 sheltered housing complexes in Dunfermline District, giving 371 spaces for residents. With a District population of 127, 258 the proportion of places available was therefore limited, particularly in the light of an elderly population (over

60 years) of 23, 854[32]. Five of the complexes were in Dunfermline itself. Apart from the District Council, the main housing associations which own complexes in Dunfermline are Cairn, Hanover, Bield and Kirkcare. Windsor Court was owned by Dunfermline District Council (disbanded in 1995) and Phillip House by the charitable company Hanover Housing Association.

Sheltered housing is 'akin to the concept of a *fold* or *secure anchorage*' (Fennell, 1987:3) and indeed the Scots name *Bield* which means a 'sheltered place', was adopted precisely with this provision in mind.

Windsor Court

Owned, up until 1995, by Dunfermline District Council, the 17 year old Windsor Court was situated on the periphery of Dunfermline. Wooded parkland, farmland and, beyond these, hills, were visible and the town centre was accessible to those who were able to walk.

The three-storey red-brick complex comprised 29 flats and housed 30 residents, eight of whom had lived there since its opening and three of whom were men. The residents varied in age from 73 to 93, each having sole tenancy over a purpose-built flat. There was a ten-year waiting list for the complex. Referral was via an individual GP and thereafter through Fife Region Social Services.

Communal property within Windsor Court included a washing room where residents could do their own clothes washing, a drying greening and a spacious communal lounge. The lounge provided sufficient room to take easily up to 100 people. It was fully carpeted, with an internal brick wall down one side and windows occupying the other. A few cupboards and side boards, containing crockery, linen and board games, lined the walls. Between two of the cupboards were stacked folding trestle tables used for communal lunches. There were a number of ornaments: animals; a clock; a wall hanging of Arabian knights; some dried flowers; a piano. A small kitchen for making coffees, teas and meals was located at the far end of the room.

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[32] Sources:
Age Concern Scotland. Older People in Scotland: Some Basic Facts, 1993
Fife Regional Council and Fife Health Board Joint Community Care Plan 1994-1997
General Register Office for Scotland, 1991 Census Report for Scotland, Vol. 1 of 2; 1991 Census Report for Fife Region, Edinburgh: HMSO.
Dunfermline District Council Annual Report and Accounts, 1991-92.

The rather worn and stained chairs were the main pieces of furniture. These were usually placed in groups to enable residents to sit as such if they wished to use the room when it was not being used for other activities. That it was rare to see residents using the common room outside formalised hours, except in the capacity of a waiting room for taxis or visitors, went largely unquestioned among staff and residents alike.

There was one main front door and a phone-entry system into Windsor Court. The Regional Council employed a full-time female warden who lived on site and was on duty for 6 hours a day during week days; there was also a relief warden-cum cleaner, working the same hours. Most residents enjoyed the regular assistance of a 'home-help'. The only other regular visitor was the community nurse. Neighbours and local people perceived the complex as 'the auld fowks' hame'.

Outside the wardens' duty hours each resident had access, via two points in his or her flat, to the Community Alarm System (CAS) operated by the Regional Council.

Residents enjoyed their independence and ability to invite into their home only those whom they wanted to see. They valued their freedom to come and go, although the majority suffered from medical conditions which precluded them from walking easily or for any distance. The protected entry system, the presence of the warden and the efficiency of the CAS combined to instil a widespread sense of security. Few residents worried about intruders.

The degree of dependency among residents was not directly related to age but to the type of illness from which they suffered. Some were able to walk easily and regularly went outside the complex into Dunfermline for shopping, hair dressing or other activities. A few could walk only with the aid of a walking frame, whilst one was confined to a wheel chair. Five of the residents were unable to communicate easily because of deafness. While physical losses experienced by the elderly were tolerated, mental losses were not. Dementia sufferers or individuals suffering from other forms of mental deterioration were excluded from the complex, partly because the necessary care was not available for them and partly because, as one warden said: "it wid upset the ither ladies tae hae fowk like that here".

Phillip House

With other buildings and houses mushrooming around it, Phillip House's position on the eastern fringe of Dunfermline, at first relatively isolated, was becoming increasingly congested. The nearest road, emerging from one of the older housing

estates, notorious for its unemployment, poverty and crime, swept in a wide arc round the site and out into open country.

Phillip House was owned by Hanover Housing Association and permission to carry out a study there was given by Hanover Scotland's Senior Company Secretary, based in Edinburgh. I was informed by the Company Secretary that referral to Phillip House was by direct application from potential residents and assured that there was 'never any problem filling places'. He was less forth-coming about whether the supply of housing of this type met demand and whether the government's emphasis on private sector and charitable housing would comprise a sufficient resource for the future.

Phillip House comprised a two-storey brick built complex with a central core of three floors of flats and a common room; four additional residential buildings fronting on to a central car-parking area surround the core. The building itself was relatively new, having only been completed in 1993. Almost all residents had moved in during the three months April to June of that year. There were 38 flats and at the time of the study these housed 58 residents: 20 couples, together with 14 women and 4 men who lived alone, aged between 66 and 86 years.

There was one female warden who lived on site and worked a five-day week: Monday to Friday from 0830 to 1600 hrs on duty and from 2200 to 0830 hrs on call. There was no relief warden but the Housing Association fielded in temporary wardens during sick and holiday leave and other periods of absence.

The communal lounge was bright and decorated in shades of blue (the carpeting, walls and doors and windows) and pink (the upholstery on the chairs). On the pale blue walls were hung various prints of landscapes and seascapes; poppies in a cornfield; an elephant in a brass frame. There was a framed metallic print of an elephant and various ornaments of elephants and rhinoceros. At one end - the smokers' circle - a large extractor fan obliterated part of the wall. In one corner sat a music centre and card board boxes of records and tapes. The chairs were arranged in small circles around coffee tables with bowls of artificial flowers as centre-pieces. The furniture in the room was always left in exactly the same positions; oppressively tidy, clean and neat.

This lounge was used by the residents considerably more than its counterpart at Windsor Court. Quite often, residents would come to sit in it at different times of the day in order to 'get a different view' from that which they would get from the windows of their own flat.

The home as a repository of the past

The individual flats and the services provided for residents were similar at each complex. Individual flats were purpose-built, each comprising a living room, bedroom, kitchen and bathroom. Residents transformed this personal space into an image reminiscent of their former homes, exhibiting abundant evidence not only of the absence or presence of family relationships but also of the customs and standards of daily life. They were free to choose their own colour of wall and floor furnishings and to bring with them the most treasured of their former furniture and possessions. There was space for washing and drying 'their smalls' and storing rubbish. The area of the flat to which the public were permitted a view was comfortable and decorative. It was cleaned copiously, particular attention being paid to the narrow hallway and front door: a somewhat redundant outward sign to other residents of the order and cleanliness of the interior. In the aptly named living room the only means by which the past was embodied in a range of ornaments: clocks and small painted porcelain figures; still-life oil paintings; photographs of family - children and grandchildren - of friends, of new babies, making their own little frozen landscape and now inhabited by a selective representation of an entire, former domestic context. Selected photographs were icons of both cultural and individual presentations. Many displayed a former spouse in early married life, inviting onlookers to see the youthfulness and, by implication, understand that the person they now regarded, dispassionately or perhaps with pity, was not always old. Actually, if one looked for them there were frequent daily reminders of the attributes of the residents' youthful years. At communal gatherings as I ran my eye down the line of seated women, gnarled and often misshapen hands folded in laps, I found myself observing the abundance of gold and silver encrusting the upper reaches of the third finger of each elderly hand. Wedding, engagement and other symbolic rings yielded testament to a spiritual commitment of devotion which would visibly outlast their physical bodies.

Rite of passage

Like people, houses have their own biographies and this fact, revealed most poignantly in the structure and lay-out of their new homes, was not lost on the residents. Many of the residents of Windsor Court and Phillip House, as chapter 5 documents, were brought up in the country. Their space had gradually transformed from the disorder and chaos of rural childhood to the order and categorisation of today. Their homes had always been intimate components of selfhood (Bachelard, 1994) - settings where life was played out. It was difficult for the flats to offer the features common to the housing

the women remembered from their youth. Their bodies and their houses had become homologous symbols of each other. For many, the new flats had nothing to do with being repositories of the past. They contained *no* past and did not connect past with present. They were sanitised and formalised products installed by planners. Physical features symbolised detachment; design features ensured the internalisation of previously communal facilities. It was difficult for the residents themselves to manipulate the space given to them. Further to this, the awareness of 'other worlds' beyond what, as later chapters reveal, was often a stifling social atmosphere, in which residents were, to some extent, 'trapped', fostered a range of different feelings among them. They were not simply passive sufferers of a renewed isolation - the media having taught them a downside as well as an upside to being young in today's rapidly changing technological society - but they did want to be able to take advantage of certain opportunities and potential. At the same time, most styles of life need to be fostered trapping the self into what modernity has to offer. Outside their immediate families, these women, as young adults into middle age, had found their social life over the washing-line, at the corner-shop, visiting relatives at a moderate distance, and perhaps now and again going with their husband to his pub or club. Compared with the images portrayed in chapter 5, the physical environments of Phillip House and Windsor Court offered few challenges to the central tenet of community breakdown - decline in sociability and co-operation. There were no longer any real backyards in which women could chat whilst hanging out the laundry; there were no people loitering on street corners, since there were no streets, only corridors. For the most part, children revealed a presence only in that other outside world.

Victor Turner's (1969) analytical elaboration of Van Gennep's early study of *rites de passage* (chapter 2) becomes unexpectedly relevant to an understanding of the social milieu within Windsor Court and Phillip House. Each place was self-contained and segregated. It was in fact very hard for outsiders, such as family and friends, to gain physical access to the building. Access was by appointment only and, even then, as I was to find on numerous occasions, it was not always straightforward. The residents were free to come and go as they pleased. Visitors were not. Visitors, including children, were marginal; for many residents they were in no way part of its life. The residents passed through a liminal stage of their lives in a setting that was finite but also liminal. It was a bounded institution. When one adds to this, however, the boundedness of old age the setting became for an outsider as total as any remote society.

Despite its apparent remoteness neither complex exhibited all the characteristics of what Goffman (1961) termed 'the total institution'. Indeed, Bond comments that Goffman's description of the total institution has so dominated thinking over the last thirty years that 'we are all likely to be guilty of accepting the inevitability of the characteristics described' (1993:218). The essential features of life at both complexes were that aspects of residents' lives did not radiate very far into 'the world outside'; and aspects of life conducted in 'the world outside' did not and could not penetrate very far in. Whilst residents were free to live as they chose, to enjoy leisure activities outside the complex, to visit their families, even to undertake work outside, most faced severe limits on what was achievable and accessible. Over time, their lives began to lack any clear separation between the three central spheres of modern life: work, leisure and family (Bond, 1993:218). This evolution was certainly more visible at Windsor Court, where, for many residents, all these aspects of life were conducted for the most part within the boundaries of the housing complex even though they were under the control of individuals.

A shared fate

The physical circumstances of each sheltered complex provided a home, security and independence. Neither, however, was a place which fit neatly into public images of either 'life' or 'death'. Unlike residential homes and hospices where, Hockey (1990:166) asserts, death is managed through a separation of living space and dying, the separation in the sheltered homes was less obvious. Here, a space was offered within which the idea and experience of transition was fostered. The transition was not, however, that between 'life' and 'death' but that between various identifiable stages of life: from 'young old' to 'old old'; from 'reasonably well' to 'quite unwell'; from 'mobile' to 'physically dependent' and so on. It was a space which provided an environment for the management of slow but chronic biological deterioration - a direct consequence of old age but hastened by illness. The death of individuals was not regarded by those living there as something either imminently likely or commonplace. When death occurred, therefore, it was with an element of surprise. This in itself came as a surprise to me. Were these people's better judgements asphyxiated by self-delusion? Were they so influenced by the cultural and social context within which they now lived, where death had been so banished from the domestic circle that it had become for them, as unfamiliar and unacceptable as for younger generations? This was a question which lingered throughout my study. For, although apparently unexpected and certainly undisclosed within the day to day social

context of either place, yet that very context could not help but provide a latent but very real and familiar encounter with the imminence of death.

Although there was no explicit awareness of a shared fate among the elderly, their move into sheltered housing was inevitably a watershed in their lives. For some, their proximity to old haunts, to places where many had grown up as children, rendered the actual move less daunting than it may otherwise have been. Nevertheless, for most, the decision to move house may have been a difficult one. It was almost certainly an irreversible one: a truth more obvious at Windsor Court, than at the newly built Phillip House. For, at Windsor Court, each resident had moved into a flat which had become vacant on the death of a previous occupant and in that move lay the unspoken truth that most would make their final departure the same way. Even so, for many, the sheltered home provided the stage for a less dreadful departure than that they feared or imagined in other sorts of accommodation. This was confirmed by some of the residents at Phillip House, who responded in the following way to a query about how they had adapted to their new home.

"Och aye, we're happy here - we've nae complaints", said Marjorie, almost defensively.

"Only yin person - Sarah. She's nae bin happy - but she's decided tae stay."

"Ah dinna ken whither there's ony ither who's foond fault wi this place", said Marjorie. "Ah wis up a flight o' stairs - a prisoner in ma ain hame, in ma last hoose", she reflected. At 68 Marjorie was the youngest resident but confined to a wheel-chair. "Whin Ah wis furst telt aboot this place - Ah thocht 'Och naw - an auld fowks hame'....Ah didna think that Ah wid ever want tae come an' Ah felt Ah wis tae young tae gie it serious thocht. But then Ah wis no' weel, an' Ah had tae reconsider. It's nocht like Ah thocht."

Many of the women residents at Phillip House confirmed this general sentiment. Their new home was 'nocht like they thocht'; neither in the sense of being a 'home' in a stereotypical institutional form of parlance, nor, at least at Phillip House, in the sense of relegating its occupants to the stereotypical behaviour expected among older residents of such an establishment.

It was certainly true that among residents at both Phillip House and Windsor Court the names of some of Dunfermline's residential homes held a great deal of potency. They conjured up mental pictures of being surrounded by others suffering from varying

degrees of mental illness; like the hospital these homes would leave residents destitute of all that they regarded as symbolically important during one's final days - ironically the home. Furthermore, individuals in poor health, those with disability or emotionally fragile, provided negative role models. As a result, many residents were keen to establish a negative identity by proclaiming who they were by asserting who they were not. Mrs Beverley, at Windsor Court, articulated these fears:

"Ma husband's bin gone twenty year. Ah never dreamt that Ah wid live that lang efter he'd gone! Ah got tae the stage - whin Ah wis bord'rin' on ninety...Ah got the chance o' this hoose", and she gestured towards her flat. "An' Ah couldna make up ma mind whither tae take it or nae, but Ah decided Ah didnae want tae gae intae a hame, because Ah'd gone up tae yon John Burns Hame". Mrs Beverley paused. "An' they're sort o'", she groaned, "layin' ower thae chairs", she gesticulated with her arms. "An' the nurse takin' them tae the toilet dribblin' a' the way. An' Ah thocht 'ach no!'. Never, never, wid Ah want tae be like that!".

Establishing my identity at Windsor Court

Permission to carry out my study at Windsor Court was given by Fife Social Work Department. One of their staff invited me to attend the weekly coffee morning. I was introduced to the warden, Betty and the assistant warden, Maureen, who provided me with a guided tour of the housing complex, including an inspection of one of the resident's flats. By the time the tour was over, the common room was filling up with residents who had gathered for coffee.

I was under the impression that I would simply filter into the group of women and start with a few conversations. The two wardens had other ideas. They briefly explained who I was and where I was from and then asked me to say something about my study.

I was ill prepared. I stood at the centre of a circle of chairs of about 25 of the residents and said that I was "looking at the place of older people in society" and that I hoped "to be able to talk with people at some time on their own so that I could hear how they thought their lives had changed over the years and to hear about some of the problems they find as older people".

It was the researcher's worst fears confirmed: to have to describe in lay-person's terms one's objectives at such an early stage of the research was bad enough; but to hear oneself tripping up on the language of political incorrectness, with the champions of political correctness from the Social Work department looking on, had me blushing

to the roots and wishing that a trap-door would open and swallow me. Almost immediately, and whilst I was engaged in this decidedly inarticulate discourse I found myself wondering how I could avoid the use of the word 'old' and, thereafter, I groped in vain for an alternative epithet which would save me from the requirement to address the old as 'old'.

Had I been able to employ the assistance of some protective practice and avoid use of the word 'old' or 'older people' then I would have felt less ill at ease. I had already told the women I was interested in the problems of old people. Why else was I there if it was not to study them? There was no way out. I was unable to conceal the fact that I saw these people as 'old'.

This particular *faux pas* seemed to cause more concern to me than it did to the residents. As I regained my seat one of the women who had been listening turned towards me and said "Ye can come an' see me anytime ye like." I was heartened by this generosity, feeling that perhaps I had just passed my first rite of entrance.

For the next 15 months I was to be involved with these people: sometimes closely; sometimes distantly. Although some of the women were unwilling for me to visit them, almost without exception giving the reason that they felt they had done nothing in their lives which could possibly interest me, it was not difficult to encounter residents who were happy for me to visit them in their own flats.

As far as the coffee morning was concerned, confusion remained in the minds of several residents who assumed that there would now be some form of entertainment, provided by me, together with the obligatory cups of tea and coffee. When, over the course of time, it became clear that I was not there to entertain but to chat with whomever I happened to sit beside, the pressure on me to be 'doing something' wore off.

When the summer months arrived and I was asked: 'has College finished fur the summer?' and I responded in the affirmative, my continued presence at the coffee mornings went unquestioned. It was assumed that I just enjoyed coming along to chat now that my work had ceased. Similarly, in the autumn, residents asked whether I was 'back at College'. It was expected that I would be there at any of their social events, but 'only whin ye've time'. The fact that I was a frequent visitor within the housing complex during term time may have been perplexing for some of the residents who, despite the ascriptions I gave to my work, found it difficult to conceive of a student's life other than in course-work and book study.

Phillip House reminiscence group

Phillip House residents knew that I was interested in their stories and life histories and, together with the warden, they discussed how they might help. They volunteered to form a 'reminiscence group' as a forum through which these histories might emerge. The group was to be the creation of an arena of visibility and performance, unstructured and unpressurised - simply another means of 'getting together'.

I was offered the opportunity to join the residents at their weekly aerobics session and to follow after this with the reminiscence group. Arriving in the entrance hall on my first Monday I saw that a notice had been pinned up on the board outside the warden's office:

Reminiscence Group with Jenny

Mondays at 3.00 pm

Since the group was to operate on Mondays, it meant that I conducted a crowded schedule every Monday, rushing from the Lunch Club at Windsor Court, to the aerobics session at Phillip House in the afternoon. Often I only arrived when the exercise class had been completed and this was a pity since, especially in the early stages of my research, the class constituted a good ice-breaker.

Although a variety of well-attended events and activities for residents took place in the communal lounge of Phillip House throughout the week (Elder-aerobics, Sewing Bee, Games night, Personal Review Group) gaining access to, and making contact with residents was not always easy.

On the first Monday of every month at Phillip House there was a residents' meeting, which I was allowed to attend; and on the first Tuesday of every month a religious service taken by a Presbyterian Minister. With the exception of Friday's Personal Review Group, I attended most of the other events at least once, and some of them regularly, throughout the year.

Many unforeseen events took their toll on the time residents and I were able to commit to the Reminiscence Group. The residents' meeting took place on the first Monday of every month. The length of the meeting impinged on the time which would otherwise have been given over to the reminiscence group. By 4.30 pm, the women would be heading back to their flats to begin preparations for their tea - the evening meal.

If, for whatever reason, the warden was absent on Monday, the residents displayed an inertia to participate in any event. It was as though the warden was not just the catalyst for participation but provided the emotional and psychological fuel for continuing to take part.

During the latter stages of my research, the warden suffered a potentially serious illness which lasted several months, and her absence led to a breakdown in the activities schedule. Although the notice board held information about events taking place, I would sometimes turn up to find the communal lounge empty, a harassed relief warden and no ready means of summoning the group together. I relied very much on the residents' voluntary participation; if they decided to remain in their flats rather than 'come down' to the lounge, it was not my place to coerce them into some alternative decision.

Some ethical and moral dilemmas

Becoming one with the older people living within the sheltered housing schemes demanded a certain sort of masquerade. There was an established and protected division between those who occupied the flats as residents and those who provided a service: the wardens, the home helps and the nurses. This was much more obvious at Windsor Court than Phillip House. At Windsor Court, during social gatherings the division was plain for all to see: the residents would occupy one side, the wardens another; the residents would be seated throughout, the wardens walking back and forth between the kitchen at the end of the room and the seating circle, or dining tables, with cups of tea and coffee. There was often an uneasy alliance between servers and recipients with a subtle aggressiveness on the part of the servers so that the initiative was held in the service relation, despite claims on the part of the servers that they would like to reduce the recipients' dependency on them. When backs were turned words were whispered. These were not always kind words and no-one was exempt. One day, after a 'soup an' pudd'n" lunch, Mrs MacBeth, having already drawn first prize in the raffle, drew the second prize only to find that she had won this too. She refused the second prize and the raffle was drawn again. "That bloody woman" Maureen grumbled as she returned with the basket of raffle tickets to the wardens' coffee table. "She says Ah've no' shook 'em weel enough". Maureen and I shook our heads in sympathetic collusion. I was not 'in cahoots' with either of the wardens and they both knew this; but I was expected to perform as an ally when this was required.

It was well, Mrs Miller had warned me "nae tae get tae freenly wi anyone". Relationships were too vulnerable and trust too thin a veneer. I too was swept up within this tide of insecurity. Thus, at social gatherings, whilst I made a personal struggle at all times for egalitarianism, I avoided prolonged intimacy with any resident. I varied my manner from what I thought was meek and apologetic to bright and cheerful as occasion demanded.

My offers to help at social events were readily accepted and gave me the right to eat lunch or drink coffee. At the coffee mornings I sat and chatted with the residents; the wardens would sit and talk among themselves at the far side of the room.

Social events did not necessarily always bring me into the circles of conversations of the older people themselves. If I was there to help with the midday 'dinner' then my time would be taken up by preparing tables, fetching and carrying food or beverages or washing up. In the kitchen the residents were out of earshot. This was precisely to the benefit of the wardens who had a score of interchanges about the people whom they were serving and which they would not have wished the residents to hear.

I ate with the wardens in their space, not with the older people in theirs. I did not wish to influence the definition of the situation that both servers and recipients had come to have. To contradict existing codes of convention and to behave as though I was one with the older people themselves would have been misunderstood on both sides of the division and would have disrupted 'normal' relations with both residents and wardens. Like the residents themselves I was expected to suppress my immediate heartfelt feelings so that harmony could be maintained. On the surface therefore wardens provided a brisk, efficient service, while residents responded with a show of gratitude for the service which came their way and respect for the competence of the servers. That I was expected to perform as a server contributed to the consensus for agreement on which people in the room were expected to be behaving in what way. Although, like Jerrome I did at times feel that I was being used and that, sometimes 'my investment was heavier than the returns justified' (1992:28).

At Phillip House the division between the resident warden and the residents took a different form, not least because the warden was herself a confidante of many of the residents. Here, social gatherings, although usually precipitated by the warden, were carried through by the residents themselves who actively assisted with preparations for the events, the event itself and clearing up afterwards.

Concluding comments

Against the backcloth of the physical circumstances of the sheltered homes, this chapter has explored the extent to which the new flats of the elderly were repositories of the past and the potency of the rite of transition. Neither Windsor Court or Phillip House were institutions of the same nature as a hospital or residential home, yet it was impossible to ignore the evident boundaries that separated them from the surrounding world. The move into the sheltered home was a watershed in the lives of the elderly and a significant rite of passage where the past was increasingly detached from the present and physical features of the new residence detached from the outside world.

Within the absoluteness of this detachment residents understood but were unwilling to articulate the truth of their shared fate. This discrepancy, together with others, stalked me throughout my study. I was keenly aware of established and protected divisions between residents and 'others'; and of the mismatch between what the elderly were aware of and what they were willing to reveal. In sensing, early on, a sharp distinction between how I saw the residents and how they saw themselves, the establishment of my own identity - my own rite of passage - at Windsor Court, took place in a state of confusion. Although it was a crucial learning experience it was also both a clumsy and embarrassing episode.

The establishment of my identity at Phillip House was equally troublesome, albeit for somewhat different reasons. At both Windsor Court and Phillip House my own 'success' as an ethnographer was crucially dependent on existing relations between wardens and residents. I leave this to a considerably more detailed exploration in Chapters 7 and 9.

Section 2

Ageing and Identity

Ye'll find mankind an unco squad,
And muckle they may grieve ye;

From Epistle to a Young Friend, Robert Burns, 1992: 150

Chapter 4

Problems of identity in old age

"It's attitudes. It's people who, because you're old, because you're infirm, because you're disabled, can't see you. They can't see the person, they can only see the category. They look at someone and say: 'oh, she's disabled...,' 'oh she's blind..,' 'oh she's deaf'! They don't see there is still a person there, " Jean explained.
"This is the problem Ah think wi age," Jim said quietly. "Ye look at someone an' ye think that they're young, auld or middle aged...ye immediately think they're not on yer wavelength.....an' ye forget that that person wis a child once an' has grown up." He paused, then asked, "How dae ye ken whit a person is thinkin' inside?"
"I know - when I look in the mirror - ", Jean smiled momentarily. "I'm beginning to adapt to it now but, for long enough, when I said my age and I looked in the mirror - they didn't equate. "I don't feel.the way I look. I shouldn't look like that because I don't feel that! And," she turned to Jim "you've said that too...you just don't *feel* old. In your mind...I mean ..okay your legs are telling you, your hands are telling you and, as I've said, the mirror.
"I've avoided looking in the mirror because that can't be me! I mean I don't feel like that. I still feel that I could dance!" Jim chuckled and Jean, caught in the full sweep of emotions, continued. "I still feel I could skip!
"It's just a fleeting image..and that's what other people see...when I catch sight of myself in shop windows - you know some shops have a (security) video there. I think....that can't be me!"

Transcript from conversation recorded with Jim and Jean, May 1994

Introduction

Old age and the living, thinking, emotional being were antagonists in the lives of Jean and Jim. Their views revealed a loyalty towards the maintenance of their individuality; they saw their allegiance being towards the continuously creative and active self. Yet they were always aware of the core contradiction between their views of the world and those that restricted them to the domain of old age. They recognised this other domain but refused to embrace it. Their outlook and their struggles in coming to terms with the endowment of old age were typical among the older people I met living in West Fife.

Personal and societal problems of adjustment to the tensions among the old, aroused by the disjunction between a personal sense of continuity in older age and the discontinuity of the ageing body, have long outweighed those of material concern (Stearns: 1977:1), and yet preconceptions about them have warranted no detailed consideration (Coleman, 1993a:98). This chapter illuminates how such tensions may be articulated, expressed and mediated. The concepts explored and the processes through which particular tensions arise are seen as an important starting point from which to consider how selfhood in old age is defined and evaluated.

Sustaining self-hood

Above all, Jean and Jim wanted to be accepted as themselves. Their lives, largely as a result of terminal illness, had changed beyond recognition. For days, and sometimes for weeks, ill health dominated. During benign periods, however, when their respective illnesses stabilised for short periods, they lived as full lives as possible. It was their illnesses, rather than their chronological age which marked them out as old: a fact observed elsewhere (Biggs, 1993:59). Indeed, for both Jean and Jim, the 'self', as experienced, as an active subject, was constantly in conflict with bodily ageing. The 'self' was still growing and developing whilst the body increasingly let it down. Necessary adjustments to this contradiction involved elements both of acceptance and denial of boundaries of possibility, regulated by the sense of a diminishing 'world within reach' and a diminishing length of time ahead. Both of these affected personal expression and understanding more urgently than at earlier stages of life.

It is not simply in a mechanical sense, however, that self-presentation and self-expression are constrained; social constructions may radically constrain too. In chapter 2 it was emphasised that the social construction of old age has to do with both the individual self and society. 'Our private view of the self' write Jamieson and Toynbee, 'is profoundly shaped by, not just the physical world, but the social world of what other people think and do.' (Jamieson and Toynbee, 1992:xiii).

Several writers (de Beauvoir, 1970; Featherstone and Hepworth, 1993; Sontag, 1978; Woodward, 1991) note the disjunction between a sense of continuity into old age and the discontinuity of the ageing body. The threat to identity is described by de Beauvoir in the following way:

> When we are grown up, we hardly think about our age any more: we feel that the notion does not apply to us; for it is one which assures that we look back towards the past and draw a line under the total, whereas in fact we are reaching out toward the future, gliding on imperceptibly from day to day, from year to year. Old age is particularly difficult to assume because we have always regarded it as something alien, a foreign species: 'Can I have become a different being while I still remain myself?
>
> de Beauvoir, 1970:315

She goes on to say that people have told her this is a false dilemma because as long as you feel young, you are young. But, she is not to be swayed from her underlying premise: 'Within me, it is the Other - that is to say the person I am for the outsider - who is old: and that Other is myself.' (de Beauvoir, 1970:316, upper case in original).

In a strikingly similar anecdote to that at the beginning of this chapter, the author J. B. Priestley, when asked at the age of 79 what it felt to be old, replied:

> It is as though walking down Shaftesbury Avenue as a fairly young man, I was suddenly kidnapped, rushed into a theatre and made to don the grey hair, the wrinkles and the other attributes of age, then wheeled on stage. Behind the appearance of age I am the same person, with the same thoughts, as when I was younger.
>
> Puner, 1978:7

J. B. Priestley's reference to the attributes of old age, in terms of physical appearance, is a reminder of just how readily identity is assessed by means of the body and how important this is in the social construction of age categories. The physical transformation of the face over the passage of time, for example, makes it very difficult, as Liggett (1974 24) argues, to conceal the fact that a person appears to have lived for a long time. Visible changes such as wrinkles and grey hair may come to be seen as a 'gradual masking of the individual's sense of "true" personal identity' (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1993:310; Hepworth, 1991). This has been confirmed by psychologists such as Biggs (1993) and underlined in ethnographic accounts, such as that of Hockey and James (1995:141). Indeed, Biggs goes so far as to say that the construction of idealized images of the body contributes to both social and physical world order (1993:36). In discussing how the physical body is used as a symbolic medium, through which change in social status can be measured, James comments that 'in the absence of more formalised initiation rites, the age, shape, size and functioning of the physical body have become important referential poles, visual images through which to document and assess change in category membership' (1986: 158).

Those who do not conform to the idealized appearance, either through age or disability, or both, are disadvantaged (Woodward, 1991). MacDonald expresses this perception whereby physical transformations of the body alienate and distance. 'I live with the never-knowing when people will turn away from me....because they have identified me as old' (1984:5). People may be categorized, assessed or disenfranchised simply because of their bodily appearance. If the old are then defined by age-status which is, itself, based on what the body looks like, then communication based on superficial characteristics is a predictable result.

Possibilities of adjustment

Personal and societal problems of adjustment to the tensions between an orientation towards the future and limiting circumstances facing older people, have long outweighed those of material concern (Stearns, 1977:1) and yet preconceptions about

them have warranted no detailed consideration (Coleman, 1993b: 98, 132). Coleman (1993a:68-96) addresses directly the question of whether, for individuals, such tensions make old age a particularly difficult period of life. Certainly it is perceived to be difficult (Coleman, Bond and Peace, 1993:12-13). This observation is supported with evidence for high levels of depression and loneliness, together with the commonly held view that family relationships lack the strength they had in the past and that this results in the greater isolation of older people (Coleman *et al,* 1993:13). Yet, despite this, the same authors, discussing the adjustment difficulties of individuals in old age, remark upon the fact that many older people are well adjusted. There are grounds for supposing that the old may not only be more able to come to terms with their situation but that this may be something 'hidden' from the young. Biggs (1993:52) illuminates reasons why this may be so. He suggests that, with age, increased personal integration of experience and individuation[1] enables the acceptance of 'previously denied parts of the Self' (Biggs, 1993:52, upper case, his emphasis).

The experience of narrowing physical boundaries

All of the individuals living at Windsor Court and Phillip House suffered from medical conditions which had provided them, as it were, with an entry ticket to the establishment.[2] Not all of these medical conditions were disabling but, as Williams (1990:27) suggests, illness, rather than old age or imminent death, first gives people experience of narrowing physical boundaries. Chronic illness may invoke in its carriers a feeling of helplessness and inevitability towards an approaching end, particularly when the illness is life-threatening. For some, the result is loneliness. One of the most powerful human emotions (Wood, 1986:184), loneliness was embodied in ordinary language, particularly, as exemplified below, in the narrative of a physical disability.

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1 'Individuation' is a term used in analytic psychology. It refers to the process, whereby, 'throughout life, contradictions and constraints upon the personality are increasingly withdrawn so that a more complete Self can emerge. It is possible then, as this struggle takes place over a lifetime, older people are more likely to be able to allow different parts of the Self into conscious awareness and thus influence their social behaviour.....Elders may therefore exhibit parts of the Self that younger people are trying to suppress.' (Biggs, 1993: 29)

2 In Scotland, 40% of people aged over 60 suffer from a longterm illness.

Loneliness exacerbated through disability

At Windsor Court it was not unusual to see participants at the coffee morning sitting quite alone, not engaging in conversation with their immediate neighbour. It was often these solitary women whom I would encounter in my initial days at Windsor Court, simply because it was easier to go and talk with someone alone than to break into a group or couple's conversation.

It was in this sort of situation that I first met Mrs. Beverley, aged 93. For her, deafness was a physical reason for her isolation from the others. She found management of her condition extremely difficult. "Ah see a' thae fowks laughin' an' talkin' but Ah canna hear whit they're on aboot. They maun think Ah'm stupid," she had complained to me. "An' in here," she gestured towards the building, "at this age when ye're lonely ye want tae be able tae chat wi the ithers ...but it's difficult". Mrs Beverley's best friend had died recently and this had added to her loneliness. "The wurst thing aboot bein' auld is that ye lose a' yer freens. A' ma best freens is gone."

Self-presentation at the Monday Lunch Club

Introduction

To illustrate how the tensions of continuity against discontinuity in old age can manifest themselves in a public setting I have chosen, as a focus for the central portion of this chapter, the ethnographic setting of the Monday Lunch Club (referred to here as the 'club') at Windsor Court. The form that social interaction and strategies for self-presentation take here sheds light on both the social construction of ageing and how older people deal with it. Self-development through participation with others is one of the major factors influencing the emergence of self-perceptions (Biggs, 1993:52). The ethnography reveals the myriad of tensions that develop when strategies for self-presentation are limited; when selfhood is under threat; and when there are constraints on human enterprise through restrictions on the means to exert genuine existential choice. It also reveals that there is little sense in which these tensions are released by the feat of social engineering of the day's events. The locus of control, attributed to those who manage the club rather than those who participate in it, introduces an element of impotence among the latter diminishing both the sharing of social experience and self-potential. The ethnography flags up issues which are used as points of departure for exploration and examination in future chapters.

Role stereotyping, inter-personal relations and identity

The Windsor Court common room was used by the Social Services to run the club on two days each week. Because it was attended largely by people from outside the sheltered home, the common room was always conspicuously devoid of the house residents on these two days during the week when it was held. The general exclusion of Windsor Court residents from such Day Care facilities within their own residence was a source of resentment among some, leading to the establishment of tension and distancing between the women who were 'outsiders' and some who were 'insiders'.

"They're nocht!" spat Mairi, one of the residents, with a contemptuous reference to the club's visitors...."they're nae better than us, jest because they come frae the ootside". Mairi was allowed to participate in the club; I wondered, on hearing this, just how much it was a warning aimed in my direction.

Mairi's sentiments were reflected in the static ties of friendships at the club. The women formed distinct groups of twos, always sitting in roughly the same positions if not the same chairs. Institutionalizing and formalizing, as chapter 7 documents, had a way of inhibiting the formation of friendships. I knew of no two women that had developed friendships as a direct result of sharing in the club. Those between the women and the social workers who looked after them, for example, would have not been considered possible, other than in a dependent, patronising way. Friendships between the women themselves proved difficult. Their interests varied greatly and they often found it hard to agree on what they would like to do during the afternoon. The method of treating the women as though they were in a school class robbed the event of its informality and was a social cue to adopt one position - teacher - or the other.

The consequences of this role stereotyping manifested themselves in a variety of ways. Care managers often had low expectations of those for whom they were providing a service. Communal conversation topics, for example, were often chosen without referral to the participants. Physical impairments, such as deafness, would isolate some potential participants; speech defects or problems in articulating a sentence would marginalise others. It was always the same individuals who would progress the discussion.

The enormous passivity engendered by the circumstances of the club needs special mention. There was the reliance by the participants on decisions being made for them and allowing things to happen around them; with the effect of discouraging a range of

other potential initiatives. There was difficulty in responding to questions during 'activity' sessions; inability to hear or to see properly what was taking place, resulting in disinterest and apathy. Even the apparently simple objective of finding out from where people came created difficulties of response. There seemed to be a marked lack of desire to find out facts about other's lives. After several months they knew little about one another, other than each other's names.

Now, all this was rather strange. To some extent, the physical effort of listening to one's neighbour or, in at least one case, the physical effort of speech itself, provided an active deterrent to conversation but the apathy seemed to run deeper than this. Part of the purpose of this chapter is to draw out the significance of this for later study. Like the residents of Windsor Court, there was no doubt that these women had many things in common besides their longevity and the club. Longevity brought with it shared physical, social and historical aspects. They were almost all Scottish. Most were living or had lived materially poor lives, as the former wives of miners, farmers or dockyard workers.

If some of the residents identified themselves as Scottish and working class it was clear that this was not a collective identity. In the same way age was not regarded as a delimiter: the collective label of 'the auld fowks' lunch club' attached to its participants by others was dismissed by 'the auld fowks' who saw others as 'auld' but not themselves. As the women knew only too well, however, their denial of old age was a very thin and fragile veneer - easily dislodged by surrounding realities. Personal admission of entrance to 'auld age' was a subject rarely raised except in humour. The consequence, of course, was double-edged. By denying commonality with the old, the women spared themselves from acknowledging their desocialisation yet damaged their solidarity.

Perhaps the crux of their difficulties was this. The women had not chosen to be with each other; they had chosen the opportunity to avoid the isolation imposed by staying at home - a crucial distinction. The idea of relational developments, which went beyond the mere companionship afforded for a few brief hours, did not even seem to occur to them - but neither were they presented to them. It was as though participants required to be trained in the art of this type of sociability; the running of the classes being the preoccupation of the Social Services who were adept at bequeathing to these women inappropriate late twentieth century models of sociability. The remaining lifetime allotted to the women and their physical ailments ensured that it was, quite simply, not worth the effort to sustain relationships beyond the limited duration of the afternoon.

Social inadequacies in the lunch club provisions

The club's clients were painfully aware of the gaps in it's provisions, yet they rarely questioned anything. The implications of this - a vague need for reprisal - sometimes surfaced. Their postponed anger was a kind of politics.

"Ma doctor advised me tae come here tae help ma mental alertness efter a hert attack," Janet, 86, informed me, "but we dinna dae ocht - jest sit roon."

When I first attended the club, during the autumn of 1993, it had been 'led' by a care manager called Yvonne. Games, comprising quizzes; the use of quite taxing published tests of subjects like general knowledge, music, theatre or medicine; dominoes or bingo, were a regular component of the afternoon session. Participants chose which activity they would like to undertake. If they were ambivalent or apathetic, Yvonne would choose instead and actively drum up enthusiasm. She fed her clients with carefully judged attempts to draw them into the conversation. Her success lay in her readiness to accord privileges with a refusal to grant concessions. After two months Yvonne was promoted to another position. With the introduction of the replacement care manager, Helen, motivation dwindled and, gradually, since the participants would find it difficult to agree an activity among themselves and, since Helen did not actively mediate or suggest a compromise, the activities themselves did not take place. Conversations, or light discussions, arguably more difficult than games since these relied on knowledge about the likes and dislikes of the other participants - which was scant - and a reasonable grasp of the subject under discussion, then became the order of the day.

The wardens were openly critical of Helen. Week by week they would store up a rash of complaints about the club's management and test these on me whilst Helen was out of earshot. The record player had not only been left out but on; the cutlery was always left dirty; the pans were not washed properly nor put back tidily.

"Dinna ken why Helen canna cope," Betty would grumble. "Ah used tae run the Monday Class an' the Wednesday Class wi yin helper. A' the people attendin' enjoyed it mair tae!" Believing that her harvest of complaints fell on sympathetic ears she would bustle on with her work leaving me to shelve these critical anecdotes for later analysis.

The running of the club and the role I enacted there followed a regular pattern. I have described the sequence of the day's events below, reviewing the conversations from

one particular day in August, in order to provide a framework to some of the issues discussed in subsequent chapters.

Combining the raw materials of selves

Rab, a Community Service Volunteer (CSV), and suffering from a minor learning disability, was already busily energetic in the common room when I arrived. He greeted me warmly and I helped him to set up the lunch tables and lay them for the eleven women who were due to attend. We spread cream-coloured, plastic table cloths over the tables to hide their Formica tops; a knife, fork and spoon and tumbler for each participant; plastic salt and pepper pots, bottles of tomato ketchup and perspex jugs of orange squash. By the time we had completed this task, the two care managers, Helen and Angus, had arrived with the food for the lunch bought from a local supermarket.

Two residents of Windsor Court - Mairi and Margaret - had sought permission to attend the lunch club. They were down in the common room an hour before the rest of the women arrived. Adopting the positions they would take at the club's formal beginning - seated at the opposite end of the room, away from the scenes of activity - they turned it into a temporary waiting room. I went over to chat with them.

"How are you today?" I asked Margaret who had settled her large frame into the adjacent chair.

"Och, Ah'm daein' awa fine", she replied. But her blue eyes had lost their usual sparkle and she looked pale and distracted.

"Are you sure? You look very pale," I replied, concerned.

"Weel", she confessed, "Ah haena bin feelin' ma usual sel jest recently. "Ah've bin feelin' sick in the morn."

"Nae morn sickness Ah hope?" asked Mairi with a coarse laugh.

Margaret ignored her comment. After some minutes Helen called me over to the kitchen to help with cutting up vegetables.

Bored and lonely, Mairi wandered over to us.

"Whit's fur lunch?" she asked.

"Salad," Helen replied defensively.

"Ah dinna like salad!"

"See ye Mairi!" protested Helen without looking up from chopping cucumber, "the day ye say ye like somethin' Ah'll fall ower backwards. Ah ken ye dinna like salads, but could ye nae fur once say ye like somethin'!?"

Mairi grimaced and returned to the other side of the room. She sat down in a chair and disappeared into martyred silence, with a mien which was to be read as: 'Far be it for me to be a nuisance to anyone'.

Mairi and Helen bartered raillery in the same way that the other women exchanged opinions about television programmes or the Royal family. Each thought that they knew sufficient of the other to indulge in light-hearted mockery which often did not stop short of causing offence. But offence was actually quite common in conversational interaction; forbearance almost a constant requirement. The exercise of gain strategies was so common that it was often easier to conceive of interaction not as a scene of harmony but as an arrangement for pursuing a cold war (Goffman, 1971:40). A working acceptance could then be likened to a temporary truce, a *modus vivendi* for carrying on negotiations and vital business.

I peeled the potatoes for lunch, then returned to the women. Registering Mairi's glum face, I asked her how she was.

"Ach... fed up," she mouthed. I said that I was sorry to hear this and asked her what the problem was.

"Ach... jest this place." Mairi, whose face had been disfigured by a badly-performed operation several decades ago, found interaction with others consistently an ordeal.

"Fowks jest keep themsels tae themsels", she said. "Ah've nae spoke tae a soul a' weekend".

"Ah've ne'er met sae unfreenly fowks as here", Margaret agreed. "Ye'd think that bein' elderly they'd want tae be freenly."

"Jest snobs! They jest think that they're on a higher level", Mairi replied.

She stood up with difficulty and stomped unsteadily out of the room. I had a sudden flood of compassion that her body only permitted her a clumsy and clownish attempt to dramatize her unhappiness.

Inertia in relational developments

The neglect of communal activity and the formality of events within Windsor Court are themes developed in considerably more detail in chapters 7 and 8. I make brief comment on these aspects here because they are relevant to Mairi's struggle to, on the one hand, creatively share in what was made available to her as a resident and, on the other, her anxiety to express her true self. The consequence of the inability to successfully deal with such inconsistencies often provoked, as explored further in Chapter 7, strong feelings of rage and retribution.

The neglect of collective activity gave to some residents the possibility of retaining more of their links with the community outside. This was particularly true for those who had previously lived close to Windsor Court and were active members of Church, clubs or societies in that area of Dunfermline. For example, one resident occupied the greater part of her time, before and after she moved to Windsor Court, by attending bowling games at the bowling green a few streets away. Arguably, the ability to maintain an active network of associates outside Windsor Court diluted the claustrophobia and the institutionalizing characteristics of the internal community formation of Windsor Court. Other residents, on the other hand, found it difficult to retain former friendships and links with former neighbours, once they had moved to Windsor Court. Most did more things with each other than with anyone from outside. The longer they had lived there, the more this was observed. Mairi, for example, had lived at Windsor Court for eleven years.

For many women, the physical difficulties associated with travelling any distance constrained their visits. These residents sought, to a greater or lesser extent, companionship and friendship among other residents at Windsor Court. When, after several years, they realised such relationships had not developed there was bitter disillusionment and despondency about their circumstances. Perhaps if they could find evidence that their peers' shortcomings were the real source of their unhappiness, then other possible sources, whatever they were - children, fellow Scots, government, history, luck or time itself - may not be examined too deeply. For, as chapter 12 emphasises and as Hazan (1980) showed in his study of a Jewish day centre in north-east London, the elimination of certain features, experiences or relationships of an individual's past may eradicate the need to evaluate their investment in these features and the return on them.

The participants arrive

The ensuing silence was broken by the sound of the oven door being slammed shut, the meal completing its course inside. I left Margaret to take coffee with Rab and the social workers. They smoked and chatted, waiting for the participants to arrive.

Despite the warm sunshine outside, none of the windows were open and the door was firmly shut making it close and stuffy in the room and harbouring the cigarette smoke.

Punctually, at eleven o'clock, a Fife Council van drew up outside. Each participant, variously welcomed by Rab, Angus or I, made their way into the room and, like a homing pigeon, was assisted to 'their' chair.

There was little conversation as the women found their seats. Flo was on holiday and, as always in her absence, Janet looked somewhat uncomfortable. She had been away for about four weeks, suffering from an illness.

"Angus come roon wi some flowers, an' Helen brocht some fish - which wis nice o' them", Janet remarked. She was a resident of Dollar Court, another sheltered housing scheme.

"Are you feeling better now?" I asked.

"Weel, aye, except Ah've got this noise in ma ears...It's like a river runnin' through them a' the time". Never one to complain she picked up her handbag and studied its contents.

"Fowk dinna like you if ye complain, ye ken", and she peered at me over the rim of her spectacles. "They ignore ye where Ah live if ye complain. They walk past yer door."

The women had drawn up their chairs into a loose circle. I turned to Agnes on my left and, after a preliminary introduction concerning her health , she recounted with relish her recent holiday in the Lake District. She had been away with her daughter for one week.

Both Agnes and Kathy, another participant, had suffered strokes. Agnes, who was left-handed, had suffered paralysis in this hand. It made small activities requiring dexterity, like nail-cutting, very difficult. “Ah dae yin nail a day”, she laughed. Illness made everything more of an effort, more difficult, and life less appealing.

Ruby, who always sat at the head of the circle of chairs, had gone to attend to her weekly task of making toast. Hot buttered toast and tea were always first on the agenda. Assisted by Rab, she sat by the toaster, inserting the bread, removing the toast and buttering it before getting up to hand it round to the rest of the seated women. For Ruby this was an opportunity to perform a useful task and to be seen performing it, as well as to chat to Rab of whom, it became clear, she was especially fond. Whilst tea and toast were being made, Angus took the register, Helen returned to the kitchen to continue preparing the meal, and the women and I chatted together.

The spatial exclusion of clientele from staff, underwritten by the assumption that the women were passive takers and the staff were active givers, assisted in the formal management structure of the afternoon. The taking of the register reminded me of a school class.

Beyond the circle of chairs, where the women sat offering snippets of conversation and sampling the highlights of each other's week, was a table set aside with a range of novels printed in a large typeface for the partially sighted. Mills and Boon, Barbara Cartland and books on the Royal Family comprised the range of reading matter on offer. Participants were allowed to borrow these books and return them the following week but Ruby and Agnes were the only women who made use of this service, not because they had better eyesight but because the other women were not interested in the range of books. There were other reasons too: some were unable to read or write.

Holding an identity together

Lunch, or 'dinner' as the women called it, was served at 12.05pm. Sitting down to eat *en famille* retained a ritual pattern. Like all repetitive behaviour the meal had its communicative and didactic functions. To the outsider it served simply to reinforce the group identity of old age. But, to those around the table - the insiders - the ritual quality of the meal permitted them to imagine themselves to be sharing more than food. Like all rituals, it concentrated time in space, allowing imaginings of family present to connect with imaginings of family past.

It took the women a few minutes to negotiate their passage from their chairs to the table and the dishing-up of the food was carefully timed to coincide with their being seated ready to eat. Food was simple, its nutritious content being considered more important than its range. Its very ordinariness served as their link with the past. Plates of fish-and-chips and frozen peas were popular, as were plates of 'mince and tatties'. Sometimes the mince and the potatoes were cooked together in the same pot and dished

up as stovies. Fried chicken, home-made soup ('broth') and, in the summer, lettuce, cucumber and tomato ('salad') and cooked, processed meats, formed the staple dinner diet. Puddings consisted of ice-cream and jelly or tinned fruit, rice-pudding, or sometimes apple pies or a supermarket's own brand of frozen dessert. The women passed little comment on the dessert: they knew it was not 'home-made'; they may well have despised the bland, artificial flavours, but they would not have made this known. They were called upon merely to eat, not to make a purchasing choice.

Since Mairi had not joined the other women for lunch, Angus went looking for her.

"She's either nae answerin' the door or she's in someone else's room," he said as he returned unaccompanied to the lunch table. "Mebbe she's asleep."

"She's nae asleep!" responded Margaret with a snort of humour. "Mairi's awa up wi the larks." We all laughed and Margaret's eyes crinkled into a smile.

"Weel, ye should know," sighed Angus, "Ye're her best freen".

Angus went back upstairs to Mairi's flat. This time he returned exasperated.

"She's in yin o' her moods." Then, in a whining, affected voice, he mimicked: 'Ah'm nae gaun back tae the Monday group. Ah want tae go on Wednesdays.'

"Weel, Mairi, Ah says, ye'll hae tae make yer concerns known tae the Social Work Manager. It's up tae ye, but it's unlikely ye'll get a place in the Wednesday Class".

Later, as we were clearing the first course dishes, Helen turned to me, a resigned look on her face, as though she felt she had to explain Mairi's behaviour to me. "Ah've tried fur langer than Ah care tae think, wi Mairi," she said. "She canna read nor write, mind. That's why she a'ways leaves the room when we hae bingo or a quiz." She sighed. "There seems tae be nae answer. She's a'richt fur a while an' then she's awa back tae her complainin'."

At lunch, in a storm of coughing, Nina choked on her food. Despite her protests, Angus insisted on calling out the doctor. "Ah dinna want the doctor," she complained testily. Angus explained to the others that he did not wish to go against Nina's wish but on this occasion he felt that he should over-rule. The doctor duly arrived and Nina received a brief check-over. She returned to the lounge and sat down again with a countenance of long-suffering. Nina was not an 'easy' client. I rarely saw her smile. Even though she had attended the club longer than any other she had remained a tourist - clinging

to her solitude like a passport. Her responses to any questions raised came in the form of a monosyllabic spit. She was distant and aloof even among the other clients.

That Nina felt it necessary to exercise her right to distance herself from the others, in the face of disempowerment by the club managers and compulsory identification with the other women, illustrated the depth of her inner conflict. This sort of conflict has been described by Biggs (1993:52) where, on the one hand there is an inner urge to preserve continuity in the face of constraint in the outside world; whilst, on the other hand, a new requirement to come to a different way of relating to the world. Nina had not yet come to a workable compromise and, in the face of this difficulty, offered herself up for self-exclusion instead - a subject explored in considerably more detail in chapter 8.

After lunch Nina's feet were raised on a little stool and she sat, staring straight ahead, her legs apart, revealing her underwear, to the obvious discomfort of Agnes and Evelyn who were seated opposite.

By 12.45 pm the women were again seated in their chairs. On this particular Monday there was to be a special presentation to Rab of some house warming gifts for a new flat into which he had recently moved. The women had volunteered to donate money towards the gifts and Angus had used this to buy a kitchen wall clock and an ironing board, carefully wrapped and ready for presentation.

There had been a good deal of noise and bluster prior to the signing of the card and the impending presentation, of which Rab had been well aware, despite keeping himself scarce. Nevertheless the role enactment was played out perfectly. Ruby, Rab's confidante, refused to make the presentation but Janet had eagerly agreed instead.

"The ironin' board wis ma idea", she whispered to me with some pride. She tottered over towards what was, because of yards of red and yellow wrapping paper, unmistakably the ironing board. With a huge smile lighting up his face Rab received the gifts warmly, thanking the women profusely.

"Ah'll take ma frock aff an' ye can make a start wi that", said Helen, directing her gaze at the ironing board.

Rab smiled blankly and the women broke into conversation as the two gifts were paraded before each of them.

"Ah'm sorry, Rab", said Angus. "The bad part o' this is that ye canna take the gifts awa wi ye, because we hae tae present them again on Wednesday! Ye see, son, baith the Monday an' the Wednesday clubs contributed. So, can ye make guid on Wednesday an' act like ye've ne'er seen them?" asked Angus

"Och aye, Ah'll dae that", replied Rab, thrilled at all the fuss being made of him.

Angus swept ahead with the day's routine. Picking up an edition of 'The Herald and Post', he opened the paper, turned to the horoscopes and once more called for the women's attention.

"Noo, ladies, it's time fur yer horrorscopes", he called out. Starting with Ruby, Angus carefully and flatly read out the relevant horoscope to each woman, adding his own lame anecdote at the end of each, an anecdote that singularly failed to live up to its expectation to arouse a laugh.

The women vied for attention during the reading of the stars. They refused to wait patiently for their turn, chatting rebelliously and noisily unless it was their star which was being read. Angus called for quiet but the women ignored him and he started trawling the rest of the pages for items of interest.

"Ah dinna ken if there's ocht o' interest in the rest o' the paper", he said, leafing through the pages. Against a hum of peripheral conversation that was almost impossible to keep in check, Angus tried to encourage the women to discuss issues invited by the more or less startling headlines he encountered. It was difficult to bring the women to heel. Eventually, after one particularly stilted discussion concerning the death penalty, there was general agreement to change the topic - a euphemism for changing the activity. The ensuing silence seemed clumsy; the women resorting once again to one-to-one conversations. They had proved hard to impress.

"Weel", Janet whispered to me, loudly and with sarcasm. "That certainly exercised the mind. Ah wonder whit's next...."

Angus, continuing to lead the day's events, returned to the circle of chairs, clasping a basket of raffle tickets. "We'll draw the raffle the noo", he announced brightly. "Ruby would ye like tae draw?"

The winner was Nina, still with her feet up on the stool; the prize: a framed print.

"Ah dinna want it." Nina said loudly, her eyes blazing, inviting retort, and the conversation around the circle of chairs stalled once again.

"Ma guidness!" whispered Janet. "Hae these people had it sae guid a' their lives or whit? Fancy no' wantin' that. Ah've had tae scrimp an' save a' ma life. Ah wid cherish somethin' like that!"

Nina pointed at Rab. "Ah'm giein" it tae Rab fur his new flat".

"Och she's giein' it tae Rab", acquiesced Janet. Rab, who was pleased as punch to be adding the picture to his previous conquests of ironing board and kitchen wall clock, laughed delightedly. It had been a good day for Rab.

There were usually two hours, from 1.00pm to 3.00pm, the close of the club, set aside for 'activities', which often dissolved into a time simply for talking. Sometimes special efforts were made to bring in an outside musician or to provide some form of entertainment. This, it appeared, was preferred by some of the women.

During the conversation about the death penalty Rab and I cleared the tables and washed the dishes whilst Angus set about the laborious task of collecting dinner moneys and entering this into his accounts book. Dinner amounted to £1.50 per person and it was important that each women was seen to tender this amount of money and for it to be collected there and then by Angus. There could be no special favours; no 'Ah'll bring it next week' allowances or 'Ah haenae got the change' type of inconvenience. Any favours or indulgences towards any person would give rise to inconsistencies and erode the special egalitarian definition of the situation which participants and servers strove to foster.

Later towards the end of the afternoon, just as I was about to leave, Helen reminded the women that I had offered, the following week, to show some slides of 'Auld Dunfermline'. She announced this with effect: "Jenny's got some slides she wants tae try oot on us - use us as guinea pigs. She thinks if we understand whit she's got tae say then onybdy else will." It wasn't said with malice; just sufficiently cutting to embarrass me.

"I thought that people here might be interested to see the slides" I explained. "They're about old Dunfermline and the locality as it used to be. We could talk about the old days. People might find that interesting." I stood in the doorway, my coat half on, and tried to gauge the women's response to my suggestion. They were looking towards me, their faces registering little emotion or recognisable feeling. Not feeling particularly optimistic that my latter comment might find fertile ground I waved good-bye and indulged myself by leaving. I told myself that even though I was supposed to be an

objective observer I did not have to stay to hear another round of compromised decision-making and that it would be easier for them to decide in my absence. I hoped that, given the usual lacklustre activities of the afternoon and the women's desire to "dae somethin'" which exercised their minds a little, my suggestion would meet approval.

It would have been easy to take over the running of the afternoon activities of the Club and, for a short period, I offered to organise quizzes and other activities, which were accepted readily by the social workers. Since I was thought of, by the participants, as 'one of the volunteers' it was not considered unusual that I should be managing rather than merely observing. Indeed there were many reasons as to why I might want to control the impression I received of the situation. As I commented earlier, active participation and interaction are much easier to record on paper than silences and banal and apparently trivial conversations which might otherwise fill their place. But I was becoming too much of a participant and not enough of an observer. I gradually adjusted my role and accommodated myself to the lethargy of the afternoons and the absence of activity which constituted the greater number of club 'events', observing how the women, sitting in their tight cluster, supplied their own solutions to the problem of occupying these two hours within which they appeared to have been temporarily suspended.

Concluding comments

This chapter has covered a wide stretch of ground. Starting with some general precepts concerning ageing and identity I have sought, in the context of the lunch club, to illuminate how the tensions arising from the disjunction between a personal sense of continuity in older age and the discontinuity of the ageing body are articulated, expressed and mediated. Within the ethnographic descriptions a number of points are highlighted below. These are considered in more detail, in other contexts, in the following chapters.

First, it was possible to observe that Angus and the women behaved in terms of opposing but unarticulated models. Angus's model emerged from outside society and from a training where efficiency and order had been impressed upon him as primary concerns. He wanted to effect a radical separation between personal elements on one

hand, and 'doing business' on the other[3]. But this model sat uncomfortably with the women's desire for intimacy and informality. Like toys that had been forgotten about, the women sat through each Monday event. Their occasions together were strangely without development. What they achieved was not so much a relationship as the demonstration of the absence of one.

Second, for most of its participants the club was unknown territory. The social environment failed to provide opportunities whereby individuals were able to unmask their sense of 'true' personal identity' and this had a marked impact on personal expression with a resultant feeling of disempowerment among the women. It is also plausible that each individual failed to recognise among the other partipants the same expressions of the need for the identification of their self-worth that one may assume they sought for themselves. This profoundly influenced interaction and co-operation among the collective. The point was made that, even after several months, the club's members knew very little about each other. Credentials for membership were sparse. They knew each other's names; one or two knew where one or two others lived and what their main health or disability problem might be, but that was about all. Nothing else seemed to be relevant. Here, the significance of the sense of self, in characterising the process of social membership, was reduced to the minimum. The women's experience of 'who they were' - their self validity - was constantly frustrated by the club's social process that subordinated self to elderhood. Myerhoff has aptly commented that we confine the elderly to 'this dreary thread' and then 'are appalled at the self-indulgent mindlessness of old age' (1984:312).

Under these conditions it would be easy to lose sight of the two primary means by which personal expression *did* reveal itself. There were, on the one hand, those, like Nina, who participated in terms of self-exclusion through apathy, silence, devolvement and resignation. There were, on the other hand, those, like Janet and Mairi, whose self-expression also veered towards self-exclusion through various realms of 'non-belonging'. As rebels and critics they exercised their own authority sending a limited one-way series of messages to the other participants but failing in the very process of interaction. For in appearing impervious to the sentiments and code of behaviour rehearsed by the others they deliberately excluded themselves.

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3 The operation of politics in intimate settings (called micropolitics by Victor Turner) has been widely and well studied; see Max Gluckman, 1965; John Middleton, 1960; Sally F Moore, 1975; I Schapera, 1956; Mark Swartz *et al.*, 1966 and Victor Turner, 1975

The care managers, relentlessly pushing the women into the day's routine, had been taught to refer to them as clients, but in truth they regarded them as little more than patients. They knew their names, 'Ruby' or 'Margaret', and the historical circumstances that had led them to becoming clients but they did not 'know' each woman as her own self. Mairi was regarded as 'difficult'; Nina, who refused medical help, as 'stubborn'; Janet as a 'deviant'. But these labels did not have very much to do with the individuals themselves; indeed, since they were largely derogatory terms, they simply served to further devalue them. The women, in turn, resisted their categorisation by the adoption of reactionary postures. Under these circumstances it was hardly surprising that apathy, frustration and difficulties in sustaining relationships were all-consuming.

The revelation of the difficulties inherent in 'developing' a well-integrated and sociable group did not stem solely from the mismatch between what social work managers considered should be generated in order to provide an appropriate service to the elderly. It revealed, in addition, the significant tensions arising out of the disjunction between an individual's self image and how she perceived she was seen by others as well as how the same others did indeed perceive her. In this sense, this disjunction, which in itself must lead to the transformation of relationships, was a perceptible rite of passage. It removed known identity symbols, both in relation to personal identity and in relation to the collective, for within both realms the participants were conscious of the hiatus between their presence at the club and their desire to be accepted as integrated and legitimate members of the world 'left behind'.

Chapter 5

The role of experiences drawn from childhood in the preservation of identity

Introduction

Apart from the possibility of self-development through participation with others, illustrated in the previous chapter, the possibility of self-development through their own personal integration of experience was a second important dimension (Biggs, 1993:52) to the lives of the older people represented in this study. Their ability to adjust to novel needs and circumstances was linked intractably with this experience and the way in which they had previously made sense of the world (Biggs, 1993:14-15).

The social experience of all the older people was influenced not only by the social and economic circumstances of the communities in which they had lived their childhoods but also by the cumulative impact of past historical events over their individual life courses (Hareven, 1995:126). Broadly speaking, these resolved into three historical-geographical layers that fed into contemporary culture among older people. The first was, for most, a childhood in a Fife community, whether a village or town; the second was youth interrupted by war and maturity in a post-war world undergoing rapid technological and social change; the third was old age in their village home, in Dunfermline town or in the sheltered community. Some of the Windsor Court and Phillip House residents had moved only quite recently, with age and infirmity, from outlying villages and rural surroundings, where they had grown up, into the housing complexes provided in the towns.

In the next two chapters I explore something of the essence of the first two historical-geographical strata to which I refer above. This exploration is grounded in reminiscence and life review, rather than from the systematic investigation of memories of pre-selected topics. As such, it is necessarily perceptual rather than factual and conceptual. Whilst I have examined historical sources and West Fife's past, as presented by various authors, I have drawn only on what seems relevant to an enhanced understanding and interpretation of the products of people's memories. I do not therefore present a comprehensive historical review but rather a view that attempts to 'fill in around' what memory brought to the surface. Biggs has commented that 'memories become the raw material drawn upon by self-presentation in the services of

current needs' (1993:52). Embedded personal experience builds individual attributes and competence and this, together with memory reconstruction, influences the individual perception of past lives. In later chapters I will look in more depth at the function of collective reminiscence in the definition of selfhood. To begin with, however, my exploration is oriented towards the way in which previous experiences contributed to the preservation of identity as a platform for security and the transmission of culture as a contribution to wider society. Coleman (1986) outlines these as positive functions served by reminiscence. My task here is to identity the positive, and possibly negative, functions of the experiences themselves. This first chapter begins with childhood.

Material deprivations

The first primary characteristic of childhood in a Fife community portrayed through life review is its association with material deprivation and poverty. The sort of account given below by Bertha and Fergus, a couple whom I had met hill-walking, was typical.

"Ma Dad wis a miner. Yin o' the children'd bin born premature an' because Dad wis on strike - it was the nineteen twenty-six strike - Maw couldnae afford tae buy the things he needed," Bertha reflected.

Her father saw no other way to provide his tiny son with the proper medication and food so he went north, hitching a lift on a Baker's van, to work on a bridge-building project near Dundee.

"He wis blackleggin'. He could not hae let onyone else know he wis workin'. He wis supposed tae be on strike an' he couldnae afford tae be on strike an' he couldnae afford to blackleg in the pit or he wid hae got shot!" Bertha's remark was not far from the truth. A retired miner living at Phillip House had, on a prior occasion, told me that he had not spoken to his brother-in-law for nearly 60 years. "Ah've only yin word tae say tae him," he had said fiercely. "Scab!"

"Some people had tae work," confirmed Fergus. "Yet their mates wid prevent them frae daein' anythin' at a'.

"It wis hard. Really hard," he concluded with forceful understatement.

In her father's absence the support of the local community was taken for granted. "The Doctor wid visit on spec in the middle o' the nicht - if he saw Maw's light wis on," recalled Bertha.

"Ah can remember this, an' Ah dinna ken why Ah can remember it. Ma very earliest recollection wis awakenin' in the nicht.

"Noo, oor hame had a little lobby." Bertha reached for a piece of paper and a pen from the desk and began sketching out her description. "Then there wis a double bed built intae the wall. Then there wis a wee openin' - an' that openin' wis a wee bed. It wisna six foot but it wis lang an' Ah slept there wi Ben the bairn." She returned to the point of her story.

"When the light come on Ah woke up. Ah heard the door open an' Ah wis greetin[1]. An' Maw picked me up an' this strange person come intae the hoose. He wis a' wrapped up wi a cap on an' a big coat on. An' Ah remember ma maw says 'dinna greet hen, it's yer Da'.

"He'd jest come hame wi a van that had come doon. He wid stay the nicht an' then, on the Monday morn, he wid gae back. He work'd so he wid hae money fur a' the things that Ben needed."

Such episodes provided strong early training in resourcefulness, the self-sacrifice of parents and the development of sound survival strategies. Missing from Bertha's description of her home, however, was any critical allusion to the conditions under which she lived. Similar to other miners' familes, however, she and her family were crammed into the traditional 'but and ben': stone floors; damp walls; leaky roofs; a dry closet outside as a shared toilet; water drawn from the street well; squalid wash-houses; and the 'privvy midden' for ashes and refuse. Coal and explosives would have been stored under the family bed, jostling for space with the family washtub hauled out for baths when required (Maxwell, 1994:21).

In her *Childhood Memories of East Wemyss* Janet Brown describes a childhood experience, when she went one day to meet her father at the pit head.

'Dad had forgotten to take his clean bath towel with him and I was sent up to the pit to await his shift coming up in the cage, and catch him before he went into the bath house. I sat on the wall watching a queue of fresh-faced miners checking in their tickets on a time machine until the cage

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[1] 'Greetin' means crying

began to roll up the shaft. A stream of men started to spill out of the opening leading from the cage. My heart sank. They all looked alike! From head to foot they were all caked in a dirty grey dust. Faces, hands, clothes, everything! How was I going to find my Dad in this anonymous crowd of grey strangers? Then, the penny dropped! If I didn't know him, he would know me! So. I stood waiting, towel in hand, until one of the dusty marching troops detached himself, walked over to me and took the towel from my hand, flashing me a white smile from his grimy face. I've never forgotten that day, the day I didn't know my own father'

Janet Brown, 1991:9

Like Bertha's account, Janet Brown's story is symbolic for its rendering of an explicit memory common to many of my women subjects, first as daughters, then as wives: the absence from the family of the father figure. More than this it was a feature common to employment across a range of industries - mining, farming, fishing and, as documented in chapter 12, the railway.

The mining identity

The material hardships stemming from employment within the mining industry are well-documented (Benarty Mining Heritage Group, 1992; Dennis, *et al.*, 1969; Durand, 1904; Maxwell, 1994; Smout and Wood, 1990; Stewart, 1886; Williamson, 1982).

Mining was of immense social and economic significance across West Fife during the childhoods of the elderly with whom I spoke. Linked by the subterranean seam of coal, older people recalled that in their's and surrounding villages it seemed that all of the men worked in the pit. Miners became miners out of necessity, to supplement a meagre income and as a result of the dearth of alternative employment opportunities. Many latent talents were never exploited. Once the mines captured these men it was difficult to escape. Although many miners, at the start of the Second World War, avoided conscription they were, in common with many other working class people, turned into bread-winners before their time.

"When ye left school, the next step wis tae gae intae the pit," said Wullie, a Phillip House resident. "It wis as simple as that."

I was reminded, on more than one occasion, about the ancient roots of coal mining in Fife, going back to 1291 when the monastery at Dunfermline was granted a lease to exploit 'black stanes digged from the ground'. For at least five centuries, coal was mined in the area; its production and export of central importance to the District's economy and character from the 19th Century onwards.

The ethos of the older people was forged during an era of intense industrial activity. Fife was once the largest coal-producing region in Scotland. Dunfermline itself is surrounded on three sides by coalfields, with the collieries of Halbeath, Elgin and Wellwood which were famous in their heyday. Cowdenbeath, at the turn of the century, was born as a result of the discovery of coal, and very quickly made its name as 'the Chicago of Fife' (Maxwell, 1994:9).

All over Fife towns and villages were dependent on coal. The coalfields stretched along the coast, with the largest colliery in Scotland, Michael Colliery, situated at East Wemyss. During the 1920s this colliery employed over 2,000 men, providing almost the only source of employment in the region.

Today, apart from the Longannet complex, there are no large pits left in Fife. But the influence of the mining era remains clearly visible in the row of pebble-dashed terraced cottages built beside the pits and refurbished and modernised by the local authority, embracing views of the seascape overlooking the cosmetic finishings applied to the landscape sweeping down to the sea. The gaunt iron winding tower, 'the pit heid' stands silhouetted against the sky - a legacy to generations of miners hauled upwards from the bowels of the earth.

The social and political environment

More than any other industry coal-mining was responsible for the social and political environment within which most of the elderly lived their childhood years. For centuries miners and their families had faced a continuing battle against appalling living conditions and desperately poor wages. During earlier centuries they had been regarded as little more than vagabonds, not only by their employers but often also by their fellow villagers. Even in death the miner was not permitted the same rights as the poorest of neighbours (Benarty Mining Heritage Group, 1992:23); he was not allowed to be buried in the same churchyard - circumstances which held well into the nineteenth century. This situation clearly resulted from an Act of Parliament in 1606 when, in response to the difficulty of attracting volunteers into mining, the Government introduced laws compelling 'vagrants' and their children to bondage in the mines (Maxwell, 1994:14). Although this form of bondage was revoked in 1799 conditions remained harsh and wages low. Neither should coalmining be assumed to have been solely the province of malehood. In the early 1800s around one-third of employees were women. Their jobs included 'the heaving of coal from the pit bottom to the surface; and often women worked undergound with babies strapped to their backs'

(Simpson, 1987:39). He describes the rough division of the young girls by employment into four classes: 'pit-head girls; girls who go to the mills at Dunfermline or Kinross; girls who go into service; and girls who become dress-makers. That is the social order of their own making' (Simpson, 1987:39).

Further Acts of parliament prevented the formation of trade unions but with the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1824, the first trade unions in the coal industry began to emerge and in 1870 the Fife and Kinross Miners' Association was formed. A particularly strong union this Miners' Association was the only one in Scotland that survived the depression of the 1870s.

A study of the history of coal mining and miners reveals that it was one littered with countless national and local strikes, as miners fought constantly to try and maintain employment, reasonable wages and work conditions (Maxwell, 1994:10). Historically and politically, Fife miners were characterised as unusually militant. In his book *Chicago Tumbles* Alex Maxwell (1994) accords Fife 'a special place in working class legend'. Fife miners persisted with strike action longer than in other regions of Scotland and their union was longer established and more efficiently organised than other miners' unions (1994:17). They played a leading role in the first National Miners Strikes of 1912; they went to the first Great World War in a spirit of patriotic fervour and returned as rebels and revolutionaries (1994:25), reacting against the horror of war and seeking change in their homeland; they were at the forefront of the Socialist movements that were spurred into mobilisation by hunger and evictions from Company houses during lock outs and strikes.

The end of the war brought about mass unemployment and a slump in the coal industry. The miners sought to improve their wages by going on strike. After a two-week strike the Government temporarily defused the situation by linking wages to output but, less than a year later, requested the miners to accept an agreement cutting their wages by almost one-quarter. The miners refused and, in 1921, were literally 'locked out' of their pits by the coal-owners. Throughout Fife there were mass demonstrations, the police moved in to protect the pits and the military were put on alert. In Cowdenbeath, in April of that year, soldiers and marines were billeted in the town, military guards were installed at every pit head and miners' leaders were arrested and imprisoned. The lock out lasted for four months. In her memoirs Mary Docherty reveals that her father was a picket at one of the pits. She details the extremes of deprivation and poverty that the miners' families endured.

'Soup kitchens were set up in all the areas in Cowdenbeath. A bowl of soup and one pound of bread was given each day. The children were fed at school. I was at the higher grade at this time so I had to get my breakfast at the infant school. We got a roll or cabin biscuit with margarine or jam and a cup of milk. At dinner time I had to go to another school for my dinner. There I got a bowl of soup. After school finished I had to go back to the infant school for my tea, which was one or two slices of bread with margarine or jam and a cup of tea. That was all the food until breakfast the next morning.'

Mary Docherty, 1992:36

The Cowdenbeath incident and the sentences imposed on the miners had a profound impact on the political consciousness of the Fife miners. Although the miners were defeated, both in 1921 and in the General Strike of 1926, unrest continued and, through the 1920s and 1930s, growth in membership of the Communist Party escalated. Leading Communist figures were actively drumming up support in the villages and towns of West Fife with constant agitation and activity, organising the unemployed, fighting the Means Test, leading the Hunger Marches, opposing evictions and campaigning for relief measures for the poverty-stricken thousands with no employment and no income.

The 1926 miners' strike lingered still in the memories of some of the women. Mrs Beverley, at Windsor Court, related the following experience.

"It wis nineteen twenty-six, the year o' the Miners' Strike. Ma husband got a job near Crossgates an' we had a new hoose, yin which'd bin recently built, it wis part of a development.

"We had tae mak oor garden frae scratch - completely oot o' nocht - oot of a field.

"The miners us'd tae come an' say: 'We're takin' that an' that an' that - onions, potatoes, carrots, leeks."

"Could you have stopped them?" I asked.

"Nae - Ah widna hae wanted tae stop them. They needed the food. They had their ain families an' nae money comin' in. A' the people who lived in the new hooses had a weekly income. So we didna mind."

She shook her head. "It wis terrible. Ah us'd tae gie the children jammy pieces because they were sae hungry."

The hardships that were synonymous with the miner's lot did not change dramatically during the first half of the twentieth century. Although comparable to the situation of miners elsewhere in Scotland the Fife miners revealed, during the last

great national strike in 1984/85, a tenacity and resolve that distinguished their own efforts. After the strike had collapsed in Ayrshire and the Lothians the overwhelming majority of Fife miners 'remained loyal to their union' and to their colleagues, carrying on their struggle 'to the bitter end' (Maxwell, 1994:13)

Internal and external boundaries to the community

Akin to Martin Bulmer's ideal-typical traditional mining community, many of Fife's communities encompassed physical isolation, with mining as the main source of employment (Bulmer, 1975:78), together with limited social and geographical mobility (Crow and Allan, 1994:27). Not only did this isolation encourage the feeling among the community that they were somehow special but, in the face of adversity, they were bound together. Yet, it was a cohesion generated, paradoxically, by division. Among the men, working practices promoted solidarity and workmates spent much of their leisure time together (see also chapter 12). Furthermore, the consciousness of class divisions between workers and employers generated a social solidarity expressed through such institutions as trade unions. On the other hand, miners' wives, as explored in chapter 13, led a quite separate, home-centred existence with, as Jamieson argues, 'a household division of labour that reflected a pervasive gender hierarchy' (1986:49).

Quite apart from the geographical and occupational boundaries of communities there was a symbolic boundary within which different Fife communities shared a similar value system. Although 'the community' was understood as its various institutions of Church, school, co-operative store and varous clubs and events, it was experienced as much more than this. The sense of the active participation of members of the community in the positive creation of community life runs, for example, throughout Williamson's account of Throckley as a '*constructed community*' (Williamson, 1982:6; emphasis in original) and, in the same way, in the mining community, it was the daily routines of the population which created the community and a shared system of values. This permeated the whole of family life and was carried forward over the years by both men and women. The attitudes and codes of behaviour of the miners continued to echo through personal and collective life long after the disappearance of the mines.

In his revealing and sympathetic, if somewhat romanticised study of life among the Kelty miners at the turn of the century Kellogg Durand continues the same theme: 'There is a roughness in the lives of miners that is unsavoury to some, a tinge of

under-civilisation that shows up in sharp contrast with the over-civilisation of certain forms of city life.

> 'The strength of a picture is often its shadows, and though a true drawing of the lives of the miners must disclose obvious faults and sad facts, yet there is something oftener felt than seen, which has given solidity to the character of the people and which may be relied on in a crisis.'
>
> Kellogg Durand, 1904:107

This was confirmed by others. 'Still today in the mining communities' according to Simpson 'there is a doggedness of spirit, a ruggedness of independence, a toughness of character and a political loyalty which was forged at the coalface' (1987:38). Their lives were governed by hardship and community values, and, according to Maxwell 'their history and the conditions in which they lived engendered a special community spirit....so that in times of industrial struggle there was unity of purpose' (1994:24).

Crow and Allan point out the 'embedded traditions of class consciousness and social solidarity find support in other social histories of coal mining' (1994:27) . As I emphasised at the beginning of this chapter, however, this is emphatically *not* a social history of industrial employment in Fife. It would be quite wrong, therefore, to suggest that my material offers substantial evidence towards the existence of the traditional occupational community, as described elsewhere, signifying the childhood years of my elderly subjects. Indeed, the passage of the years, together with their new living situations in the sheltered houses, had a tendency to erase some of the legacy of the historical circumstances which had helped to make these people what they were. What was so striking was the diversity of the people among whom I worked and, were it not for what they told me about their past and what the text-books recounted, it would have been easy to have been sceptical about the evidence for connections or any sign of unity between them. Yet, despite the striking differences that emerged there was an inner core of similar beliefs. The coal industry gave not only villages a specific identity. It gave whole communities of people a specific identity of a type that left its legacy with implications for internal relations and communitas. The Fife miner was endowed with a pride in his origins that was as basic as breathing. Hardships and adversity created resourcefulness and strategies for coping. These in turn were underlain by a shared system of meaning and values which the elderly drew upon to give a coherent account of their social lives then.

Alternative occupational identities

In Fife the features of the 'occupational community' were perceived to be evoked within a whole range of other industries that evolved on the basis of available resources (Waterton-Anderson, 1997). In their hey-day many of these industries were internationally famous. For reasons of space, I am unable to justify an examination of each industry in turn, but they are noted here for reference. Apart from the coal mining communities, there were the farming communities, the fishing communities of the East Neuk; the linen workers of Dunfermline, where many of the miners' daughters found employment as hand loom weavers; linoleum workers at Kirkcaldy[2]; the railway workers at Thornton railway depot[3]; and the engineers and defence workers associated with Rosyth naval base for defence. Moreover, although of lesser significance, there was no doubt some kind of solidarity built around the paper mills at Markinch and Inverkeithing; the railway repair yard and shipbuilding at Burntisland; and the Leven iron foundry.

Community aspects of the auld grey toun

In many respects perceptions of past life in Dunfermline town, and its distinguishing trademarks then, was itself central to the ethnographic encounters I enjoyed there. The slide show, to which reference was made in chapter 4, took place with the lunch club participants and residents of Windsor Court in attendance. The resultant narrative provided a range of insights into the significance of past experience.

'Dunfermline Toun', for all its backwater characteristics, was, for many of the 'auld fowk', a second mother with ways of dispelling worries and imbuing security. Like a favourite story they had learned the moods of the place, savouring the parts they knew and loved best: Pittencrief Park, the High Street with the town clock, the Abbey, the museums, the old theatre and the secret places which mustered groups of children during weekends that stretched infinitely before them.

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2 By the end of the nineteenth century Kirkcaldy was the world's most important town for the manufacture of floor coverings (Waterton-Anderson, 1997). "Fur Ah ken mesel, by the queer-like smell, that the next stop's Kirkcaldy" one of the former railwaymen had told me. The "queer-like smell" was linseed oil which, like the cork bales shipped into Kirkcaldy harbour, was essential to the production of lino.

3 see chapter 12

The presence of children playing on the streets formed one of the most potent images of change from the early part of the century. Groups of children played on every available street and its corner. They looked as though they were not well fed, or dressed, and as though they could do with more sunlight and green fields. They ran around barefoot, their heads covered: cloth caps for the boys; straw bateau's for the girls. The differences between past and present, at least in a social and economic sense, were never more distinct.

The residents energetically discussed what they recalled as they viewed streets and buildings which had changed out of all recognition. What they said related to how they remembered their tangible surroundings 'in their day'. Their attention was drawn largely to piquant physical environmental changes. Along Park Street, now devoid of buildings apart from Windsor Court, an Indian restaurant, a pub and a sprawling car-park, much of the physical past had been obliterated. Gone was the pipe factory and the lemonade factory, where all that remained of people's work and lives were sudden flashbacks of machines grating behind opaque windows; the coarse sounds of shouts and laughter. All day and all night the noises and smells of the district - factory hooters, the stink of burning materials - reminded them that life was a matter of shifts and clockings-in-and-out.

Also emerging within the narrative, however, was an image of neighbourhood that was not transparent around the streets of Dunfermline today. Perceptions of past life indicated an extremely local life in which everything was remarkably near. Home had been private but, in the uniform and often mean and squalid streets of parts of the town, the front door would open from the living room to the street. And when you opened the door and stood or sat on the front step you became part of the life of the neighbourhood. Even the photographs seemed to confirm this. The houses pressed together; the streets were narrow; the shops just round the corner. Indeed, there was barely a street without a corner shop (the housewives' club, so one resident joked), usually a general grocer's or a paper shop. Some had intimate knowledge about who used to own which business, where you went for your fish or your fruit or your shoes. It was a world in which, it was implied, everybody knew everybody else: who lived alone; whose daughter would help with the messages; whose husband was skilful at joinery; whose drank too much; who took his wife and children to Blackpool each summer. The celebration of the open-door policy, indicating communal sociability, so central to the notion of community (Dawson, 1990:153) was an element of life that the women drew upon to emphasise differences between their lives now and then.

Neighbourhood and community, seventy years ago, was about living within a small and well-defined world. There was little privacy. Everybody knew everything, it seemed, about everybody.

Even whilst they were talking I found myself reflecting on the significance of their discourses, jogged into action by the views of the 'auld toun'. Schutz (1967) reminds us that memory is subject to reconstruction in the here and now. I was left to ponder whether these selective emphasises on localness and intimacy were for my benefit or whether the primary visual force of the images was merely the sharp reminder of how they remembered they used to relate to the world compared with how they recognised they related to it now? How did they resolve the opposite pulls of, on the one hand, the desire to preserve continuity of self-hood and, on the other hand, the apparently obvious discontinuities between past and present?. My intention is to return to these questions later, in chapter 6 and section 5.

Alternative reconstructions of the past

Descriptions of and allusions to community life during childhood years were almost always influenced by positive descriptions of community life: of a sense of cohesion. But the idea of solidarity within an occupational community, whether mining, farming or linen, did not offer an amnesty from the perception of memory of harsh and difficult times in the past. Their hardships were themselves central referents in the common explanation of the internal features of their communities. Whilst never denying their appreciation of this fact, however, it was not always central to their preoccupations with their childhoods. Their sometimes conflicting considerations of past life were indications of the active re-creation of how older people wanted to remember their childhoods as well as the products of complex social structural promulgation. For some, the only way that the features regarded as synonymous with the occupational community of the past, could now be articulated was in kailyard and kitsch.

> 'I often meet the folks when East Wemyss was my hame,
> We sigh and we agree that things will never be the same;
>
> We reminisce of olden times when I was very young,
> And memories of golden days slip easily off the tongue;
>
> And think about the happy days we spent down on the shore,
> In wintertime we gathered coal beside the tidal roar;
>
> But summertime was best of all, we paddled on the brine,
> While mothers on the foreshore, hung their washing on the line;

> An then they'd sit down gladly, on the fitting for a rest,
> Enjoying the golden sun, with merry quip and jest;'
>
> Brown, 1991, Childhood Memories of East Wemyss

Described in this light it is not hard to see why many of the older people made reference to a past golden age which, at the same time, seemed to lose sight of the material hardships of these same communities of people.

Thus Dan Imrie (Imrie, undated), who published his reminiscences of his 40 years as a coal miner, described his early childhood, before he went into the mines, in terms of robust and positive imagery that seemed to brush over some of the major challenges he will have faced as a child. He grew up as a child in the mid-thirties in a small village which comprised one row of houses, the nearest large village being three miles away. His early experiences he describes as deeply embedded in relationships with friends and fellow workers.

'Many a happy hour I have spent just listening to the characters and the tales that the farm workers could spin from past times on the farms where they had worked' he wrote.

Within farming communities, each agricultural event during the calendar year drew a very large work force in order to help diminish the physical strain. At harvest time, the miners would help out after their shift. Tattie howking, or potato harvesting, involved a very large contingent. I was told by residents that it was a common sight around Dunfermline during October to see men, women and school children massed in the fields, gathering in the harvest. Such was the demand for labour that schools were closed for around two weeks in order to allow children to help with the harvest

Dan did not mention that farm work often involved the school children and that it was physically hard and consuming of labour. In common with Erikson *et al.*'s (1986) observation I found that often what I might have considered to be important issues were washed over in childhood descriptions. Sometimes they weren't mentioned at all. For example, Margaret, a Windsor Court resident emphasises, below, the community aspect rather than the hardship aspect of her child labours.

Relating to me her childhood years at Crombie she spoke of her simple and unquestioned life style. "Ah left school at fowerteen - usual fur lassies o' ma generation. Ma furst job wis tatty howking".

This came, however, to an abrupt end. "Ah come back frae work tae hear Maw say that Ah wis gaun tae work in Dunfermline." There was no argument. "At that age, parents used tae decide aboot yer work," Margaret explained.

Of tattie howking: "we were yatterin'[4] a' the time. Frae echt in the morn tae five in the evenin', when we finished. There wis a great deal o' banter, fun an' guid humour."

The marginalisation of certain aspects of childhood was significant because historical accounts of childhood such as those detailed in Jamieson and Toynbee's book *Country Bairns* (Jamieson and Toynbee', 1992) depict circumstances often far from rosy. In his book *The Child in the Country* Colin Ward indicates 'the very real harshness of life for mostly rural children historically' (1990:25), in that the absence of so much that we take for granted today meant that they were often hungry, cold, sickly and abused as well as over-worked. Children were an insurance policy against the constant threat of emotional loss and financial ruin. The size of families also meant that help, both physical and financial, from children was crucial (Straw, 1986:367). Bertha's account of her school days was a potent reminder of this.

"Ah went tae school but Ah wis a'ways late because o' milk deliveries afore school" Bertha told me.. "It wis a great help - three shillin' a week that Ah brocht in - that wid buy three hundred wecht o' coal - mair than wid burn in a week. That's hoo muckle difference it made in the hoose.

"Maw a'ways made sure that we were gainfully employed! We had tae dae oor chores in the hoose. We a' had tae dae them an' e'en when we were still at school, when Ah wis ten year auld, we still had tae help. Yin o' us wid dae the ironin' an' yin o' us wid put the claes through the mangle. Ma eldest sister got tae dae the ironin'. An' when she started tae work, Ah did the ironin' an' ma young sister an' brither got tae put the claes through the mangle. Ye see there were seven o' us.

Efter we started tae work, ma sister worked in a Dairy shop an' Ah worked in the Co-op. On Wednesday efternoon a' the shops were shut - that wis early closin', an' we finished at twelve o'clock, then we come hame an' had oor dinner, then we had tae help. One o' us had tae dae the twa wee bedrooms an' the ither had tae dae the livin' room, while ma mum did the kitchen. Johann, the bairn, wis born when ma sister was

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4 yattering means chatting

call'd up tae the War - an' she wis awa an' Ah had tae gie up ma job an come hame tae help."

As unpaid labourers the children were vital to 'peasant household economies' - hence the ability of schools to close during the potato gathering season; and, as the lowest common denominator of the miner's family, they were easily belittled - particularly by the unthinking actions of local rural gentry to whom deference was owed. These village children - today's old - possessed such 'pitifully low expectations of life' (Ward, 1990:25) and were so marginalised in the operations of their communities that they were virtually invisible in historical accounts.

Co-operative behaviour

Communal tasks formed the essence of work in farming, mining and fishing. The fishing ports of Crail, Anstruther and Pittenweem were remarkable, at least seen from today's perspective, for the intensity of communal participation among both men and women in the winter herring fishing industry. Even when the last of the steam drifters sailed south in 1956 to Yarmouth, the seasonal migration of labour from the East Neuk to England still provided the opportunities for the show of collective dignity and strength.

In the mining communities, together with work in the pits, local co-operative societies, such as the Lochgelly Co-operative Society, were immensely strong and well-supported. The Co-op was not just a shop and bank, paying out dividends ('divvies') twice a year to housewives so that they could purchase new shoes for the children or a new dress for themselves; it was, more importantly, a social organisation (Waterton-Anderson, 1997). Thousands of people would attend the local Gala Days and the 'Store Treat'. These events demonstrated the strength of the sense of local community. The 'Store Treat' was the Co-operative's means of rewarding the local community for their loyalty. During Cowdenbeath's 'Store Treat', for example, captured on film in the 1920s (Waterton-Anderson, 1997) it really does appear that the whole town turned out for the day of festivities, which included a grand parade, bands, children's fancy-dress, sports, races and the distribution of 'goodies', and where people dressed in their 'Sunday best', the children wearing new clothes; the women in tailored outfits; the men, when they could afford to, hats instead of caps.

Togther with the social organisation provided by employment, the decline of social organisation provided by the co-operative societies radically distinguishes, in these same towns and villages, the local community of the early twentieth century with that

of today's; in Cowdenbeath, the only vestige of a co-operative presence today, for example, is a funeral parlour. The socialising, the camaraderie and the gathering together of people to socialise as a town or village, or to perform labour-intensive tasks are regarded as characteristics of life now lost forever.

Internal features of the community

In various ways, in their conversations and in their celebration of local popular culture, the elderly reconstructed 'stereotypes' that depicted powerful 'images of earlier life' associated with the 'past' and 'rural' (Philo, 1992:194). The issue was not what 'the community' was or was not, but that the elderly used these certain stereotypes and stories of their past worlds to interpret the present. At the same time they constructed stereotypes of today's young by contrasting the harshness of their own young lives and by indicating how much people today take for granted, with references aimed at the young, such as, 'they dinna ken whit bein' poor is!' or, 'the whaurwithal fur them tae learn is there! It wisna there fur us! We taught oorsels everything we needed tae know!' Such regularly repeated claims about past lives and values were not made without justification. In attempting to make sense of their significance for individuals' adjustment strategies to present situations I have drawn on some narrative which took place between Bertha, Fergus and myself, reducing it to five separate categories that I feel were the most generally represented experiential stereotypes drawn upon by the elderly to express the prevailing identities joining their past with their present contingencies.

Material resourcefulness

Like many others Bertha and Fergus had started married life in a 'room and kitchen', one a bedroom, the other a living room - often referred to as the kitchen (Straw, 1986:367).

"Not many people had mortgages then," said Bertha. "Hooses were scarce. Newly marrieds aften stayed in a room somewhere. They used their savin's tae buy a hoose an' furnish it.

"When we got married furst Ah'd a wee box wi twa spaces - Fergus made it special. The mortgage, which wis a' o' sixteen shillin' a month, went in the yin side and, in the ither, went the electricity, the gas an' the rates.

"Fur fuel, the regular thing wis a bag a week - e'en though it wis summer - an' that wis stored up fur the winter. E'en noo, people ne'er think on. In the summer time ye dinna use sae much electricity.

"An' we'd buy coal in the summertime...ye sav'd the price o' a quarter o' a ton.

"In the winter coal wis rationed. If ye didna buy it in the summertime ye were short in the winter.

"In nineteen thirty nine the miners were awa an' coal wis rationed. We were still buyin' brickettes - coal dust compressed thegither wi some oil an' ither things. Efter the war coal wis rationed an' scarce. We were only allowed yin bag a week".

"Ah a'ways budgeted. Ah put extra money in fur the next year an' ye should hae seen the greetin faces that came tryin' tae borrow money cos they hadnae enough money tae pay their electricity an' they thocht they were gaun tae be cut aff." Bertha turned to me smugly.

"An Ah wid say - ye should budget!

"There wis some people ye could nae get that hame tae. They jest didna understand. Och they wid understand whit ye were sayin' but they ken damn fine that they wid never be able tae carry it oot!" Fergus spoke with measured glee.

"Financially we haenae come intae a lot o' money." Bertha continued. "We haenae won the lottery but we learned thrift when we were young so we've a'ways bin thrifty. We saved. We really saved.

"Noo, ye look at whit th'ither fowk're daein' wi their money. They're gaun tae the Bingo an' places like that. Weel, that we wid ne'er dae! They were buyin' the wrang stuff an' spendin' their money the wrang way!"

"There's a sayin....which auld fowk still say: "'Ah widna like tae see him in a turnip field at tuppence a hundred yairds. He widna make saut fur his kail'. This means he wid no' make enough tae put salt on his soup.

"Ye see, nae bein' in poverty involves work," said Bertha. "If we couldna get tae the toun fur a week, weel - we'd manage!"

'Makin' somethin' oot o' nocht'

Bertha, a dress-maker, and Fergus, a violin-maker, had revealed explicitly their development of self-preservation when they spoke about their ability to make something out of nothing. They told me how cleverly they had produced useful tools and implements from the dregs left behind by others: kitchen utensils, food containers, cupboards. "Hauf the furniture in the hame" Bertha laughed proudly, were the product of their ingenuity and thrift.

Fergus exhibited a deep confidence about the direction of his life, determining that he would follow a career of his own choosing. This assurance was something I found common to some of the other men like the railway workers and Jim, a resident of Phillip House, whose memories are detailed in chapter 6.

"Ah wis a'ways desperately interested in woodwork. A'ways", said Fergus.

"Ah wis comin' hame yin nicht fae shawin'[5] turnips an' Ah went intae a contractor's at Crossgates - John Reid and Son. Onyway, Ah went in there jest on the chance ye ken. Ah met the contractor an' he asked me whit Ah wanted an' Ah telt him whit Ah wis interested in. He asked me a few questions. Ah canna remember whit they were or whit answers Ah gave," and he laughed.

"'Weel sonny', he says 'ye gae doon tae Kirkcaldy on Monday morn. An' so, Ah started work as a joiner. Ah had tae gae doon tae the railway station at Cowdenbeath, tae get the train tae Kirkcaldy.

"Ah remained a joiner a' ma life. As a *woodworker*, Ah wid rather say, than as a joiner." For Fergus this was an important distinction.

"Ah became a guid wood worker. Ah canna say that Ah can attribute it tae ootside influences. Whit Ah've achieved in ma career, maistly has bin a' sel'-taught. Mostly a' ma ain efforts. No' due tae onybdy else - cos, ye see, when Ah started my apprenticeship, ye didna dae anythin', mair than roofin' an' so on.

"Ah us'd tae sharpen saws - taeday they throw the blessed thing awa - with a file. Ah wis sae adept at sharpening saws that Ah did it fur the ither boys an' apprentices which

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5 cutting

meant that they handed me a saw an' a file, at a penny an inch. The net result wis that Ah ended up wi loads of files. Ah ne'er once bocht yin.

"We ne'er had anythin' unless ye could mak it. We didna hae the money tae gae on anything. Onybdy who'd a faither who wis workin' or that, weel ye could gae an' buy somethin'. But we didna!. We a'ways had tae mak everything. It wis a question o' makin somethin' oot o' nocht."

"That's richt" affirmed Bertha. "We baith did it."

Bertha pointed at the footstool beside me. "Fergus made the little footstools an' Ah made the upholstery tae go on them." Then, in a sweeping reference to the continuously creative being, she stressed "We've done that a' oor life!"

A sense of time

The best part of being a joiner, Fergus told me, lay in the leisure hours when he relished the time he could give to his hobby of wood crafting. He derived a tremendous amount of pleasure from indulging in this. As Fergus acknowledged, "fiddle-making came a lang, lang time efter Ah furst took up joinery." But, "at the back o' ma mind," said Fergus. "Ah a'ways knew that someday Ah'd make a violin. In fact," and he gestured modestly towards the table where Bertha, his wife, had displayed these amazing works of art, for my inspection, "Ah've noo made six!"

Neither Fergus nor his wife Bertha concerned themselves with time. When I enquired how long it had taken Fergus to make one of his creations, he became exasperated with me. "Ah weel, ye see these were a' made in ma leisure hours. Ah' ne'er kept time."

"Ah tell ye...eh...time." Bertha hesitated. "It wis nocht tae him when he wis workin' on anythin' like that" she pronounced.

"As a priority," continued Fergus on the same theme, "Ah dinna regard time as important. A' ma life, since school, Ah've a'ways bin daein' somethin'. A'ways daein', daein', daein'. If ye're makin', time is nae important.

"Ah wis workin' weekends an' nichts whilst ma contemporaries were gaun tae the dance. Ah wis daein whit Ah wanted tae dae. Ah didna think anything o' it!"

Despite Bertha and Fergus's denial of a sense of allowing time to preside over their work lives, yet their way of life was imbued with a sense of predictability, very much in the ways highlighted by Straw (1986:413-415) in her study of working class women

in Falkirk. Just like the factory workers and miners, where machine and work time, clocking-in and clocking-out were the norm, Bertha and Fergus carefully scheduled their lives to meet their expectations and needs within their carefully ordered daily, weekly and yearly routines. Brought up in large families in crowded accommodation they were unused to space. Home had to be orderly. There was little margin between meticulous order and chaos. Within the home, like the homes of their elderly neighbours today, high standards of cleanliness, control over their future needs and, ultimately control over time, were admired. For how could one make plans for the future: when to dig up the potatoes, when to pick the apples, when to order coal, without a keen sense of time? Their whole conversation resonated with the influence of order and a created predictability built on the confidence that they 'wid manage'; 'wid a'ways hae work'; 'wid ne'er go hungry'.

Learning

Emerging out of Bertha's life and that of her husband's, Fergus, was a tenaciousness to learn and to excel in what they had learned. Lack of confidence seemed to be foreign to these two people. Fergus admitted that his daily work as a joiner "wisna enough. Ah wanted the finer aspects of the wood workin' trade. So Ah went tae nicht school an' Ah built masel a wee workshop an' Ah spent every spare hour Ah had at the place, in that workshop jest learnin' tae dae things that Ah knew Ah should hae bin gettin' taught at ma work. Normally, ye'd expect tae get taught in the work. Ah wis daein' a' this on ma ain."

The consequence of this was articulated in the security and simplicity of Fergus's current perspective on life. "When ye come up against a problem - it's nae a problem really. Ah like challenge because Ah've had challenges a' ma life.

"E'en somethin' Ah haenae done afore, Ah've experience an' knowledge jest tae gae an' dae it! This is drawin' back on ma experience in earlier years. It's a great feelin'. It's a feelin' that bein' oot o' work will ne'er happen.

"We're better aff today than we've e'er bin in oor life," Bertha emphasised.

Conflicting values

For Bertha and Fergus, learning was a part of being a Fifer. It was one of the first acquired and most deeply embedded values they held, completely enmeshed with their love of family and home. It was redolent with all the emotions attached to their early

experiences. Indeed, for all the older people in this study, it was a symbol and strategy of major unifying concern, joining all the phases of their lives[6]. But, as symbol and strategy it was touched with irony and pain. First, most of the women and many of the men had only limited access to education. Second, whilst they felt that learning had been the key to their children's successes, it was also the means by which their kin had left them behind and the cause of the redundancy of their traditions. Older peoples' perspectives on this situation was expressed indirectly. In revitalising the strengths of their former achievements they often made comparisons with today's younger generations, perceiving in a generalised manner a range of values counter to their own. Above all, they had grown up within a culture ordered and coded in a way that seemed to conflict with that of today's young. Their's was the pursuit of respectability; to lead an independent, orderly and less than brutal existence. In this direction they had been created givers, not takers; proud and autonomous. Out of scarcity and a precariousness of money, employment and life itself they created order and meaning, retaining human dignity and self-determination against the odds. When I discussed with Bertha and Fergus how they saw today's generation they were full of disgust for their lack of initiative and contemptuous of what they preceived as their complaints about the lack of a future.

"A wise man gets learnin' fae them that hae nane tae themsels", said Bertha. "De ye ken that sayin' Jenny?" she asked. I shook my head.

"It means that ye can learn somethin' frae everybdy in this world."

It's ridiculous!" She raised her voice indignantly, hobbling my response, "because Ah tell ye - the whaurwithal fur them tae learn is there! It wisnae there fur us!" she warned.

"It wisnae there fur us," Fergus repeated. Flushed and animated, he hurried on. "We taught oorsels everythin' we needed tae know. Today, they can go an' learn an' be taught aboot any subject they like, practically!"

Bertha, taking delight in this train of conversation, bristled with indignation. "An' if they buy somethin' that disna fit, they need tae take it tae a dress-maker. They canna even shorten a skirt tae themsels!"

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6 "Learning" here corresponds to what Sherry Ortner (1973) in her article 'On Key Symbols' calls a 'key scenario', a symbol that is also a method for attaining a valued cultural goal.

"Ach, every young person is nae like that!" she then admitted. "There's lots o' them still daein' things fur themsels, but they're few an' far between, an' ye never hear aboot them!"

"Ye only hear aboot the yins who hae nocht tae dae an' turn tae drugs. They canna get a job because they willna take a job." They were shouting over each other, competing for listening space and greedy for this. "Ye see," Fergus started to justify their position. "The thing that *Ah* recall, the fowk who hadnae a reasonable life style - they were useless! Didna dae anythin'! But we ne'er stopped! We were ne'er stuck fur anythin! We would mak dae, mend, dae things. The ither yins, who had the money, they could jest gae tae the toun an' buy. It wis sae easy fur them tae dae that.

"Ah never say Ah can dae somethin' an' nae dae it. If Ah say 'Ah'll hae a go', Ah'll dae it."

The behaviour and attitudes of today's young people was easy conversational material, fostering a range of emotions among the old. In another conversation with Jean and Jim, residents of Phillip House (chapter 6), different conclusions were drawn.

"Well if you think of the young people today, even our own experience here - young people who have broken in here, are on drugs and things like that....in your day, that would have been almost unheard of," said Jean to Jim.

"Och aye," he agreed. "E'en though there wis poverty there wis respect fur persons an' property. Efter the war everythin' wis very precious tae us - hame an' family.

"Ye see, a lot o' these young people today," said Jim. "They've never had a chance - bein' fair tae them - they've ne'er had a chance, because their parents hae nae bin enlightened an' responsible enough tae guide them, tae help them tae be the guid citizens that we were."

"Well, their world has never been threatened," Jean commented. "The parents of today, of these sixteen and seventeen year olds, also grew up after the war. And where families were building new lives..and there has been this big tendency to give their children everything that they didn't have...and it's not really a good thing...I mean really...these young people growing up today think that they only have to ask and it's going to be given to them....they don't have to work for it...they don't have to strive for it...the government will chip in."

"Ye see, a'bdy's in their ain generation," Jim said sagely. "The world is a'ways changin'. People are a'ways changin'. It's a' very weel tae say so an' so, but it disnae a'ways work oot."

Jim and Jean sought to transcend the differences between past and present, achieving a sense of beneficence towards the young, within the terms of the world they felt now confronted them. On the other hand Bertha and Fergus, in their active comparison between past and present, emphasised the differences rather than the similarities between generations, and took the high moral ground for themselves, whilst leaving the low ground to the young. Coleman and McCulloch (1990) adopted the concept of 'moral siege' to describe this characteristic set of attitudes. Coleman (1993b:109) describes this as a way of coping with social change which enables individuals to remain satisfied with their past lives. Thus, accepting the values of modern society was tantamount to denying meaning to their own lives as they had led them. However, as Coleman (1993b:109) also points out, this is not an entirely satisfactory position, because there is always pressure to adopt more modern values. The problems created by the ensuing tensions are given a second airing in chapter 10.

Concluding comments

In parallel with the central theme of this chapter, the discourses documented above directly addressed issues of change. Social change is lived by individuals. Profound and ineradicable change was evident between the lives that these older people had experienced within the occupational communitites of the past and the lives they now led. Their earlier lives, built around the primary cultural referent of the occupational community, helped to explain the internal features of what the older people perceived to be the communities and neighbourhoods of their past and the cluster of ideas shaping their individual notions of the life possibilities open to them. Poverty, political impotence and physical insecurity accounted for the overarching parameters of their existence.

Personal resourcefulness and learning, as symbol and strategy, joined all the phases of the older people' lives, making real the continuities between past and present. But what they had learned was not the same as that now on offer to the younger generations. Indeed, today's opportunities to learn seemed only to serve to further polarise them from today's young; to bring about cultural conflict and to make redundant their traditions. And although these elderly spoke as though younger generations were foreigners within the social, moral and cultural milieu that the old

espoused, there was a tacit recognition of the fact that it seemed it was they, not the young, who seemed to dwell as strangers in the world they now inhabited. More than anything else, there was a helpless realisation among them of the contradictory social and moral climates they straddled. They themselves had played a part in the changes which brought about material and other benefits but they now found it difficult to see of what these 'other benefits' comprised. Past and present; older and younger were radically polarised. Concepts of solidarity and of 'standing together in the face of adversity' appeared, so the old thought, to be foreign to today's young. Ironically, it was the very means of learning self-help that had both taught the old how to mobilise the means for solidarity and yet most distinguished them from todays' younger generations.

Successive chapters lend support to this recognition among the elderly that their own values seemed to conflict so radically with those of 'the young'. Such cognisance concerned them and was communicated most directly through relationships - both peer and kin relationships - and adherence to a collective identity. The sheltered housing, with its demarcated groups of individuals, offered the opportunity to examine these relationships and the development of collective identity through social membership and social integration. These particular aspects are addressed in chapters 7 to 10. In order to evaluate the nature of the second of the historical-geographical triad to which I refer earlier, however, it is the years of youth interrupted by war and maturity in a post-war world to which I turn next.

Chapter 6

The interruption of youth by war and maturity in a post-war world

Introduction

The previous chapter explored some of the dimensions of childhood in a Fife community that fed into contemporary culture among older people. The second historical-geographical layer, dealt with in this chapter, is that of youth interrupted by war and maturity in a post-war world undergoing rapid technological and social change.

It was suggested in chapter 5 that hardships and adversity experienced during childhood created a great need for resourcefulness and for strategies for coping. The nature of resourcefulness was not only material but embraced emotional, psychological and spiritual resourcefulness. Like material resourcefulness, however, these in turn were underlain by a shared system of meaning and values which the elderly drew upon to give a coherent account of their social lives then.

This chapter continues the exploration of earlier lives, in the context of a major world event - the Second World War. The experience of war helped to shape not only the experience of the young of that generation but their attitudes and the values they held. The 1994 D Day remembrance activities, coincidental with this study, engaged perhaps more poignant and sharper recollections of the war, and it is for this reason it holds a prominent place here. Ideas and thoughts about the war are viewed through the eyes of a married couple, called Jim and Jean, who were residents of Phillip House. Although theirs is a unique view, it is also one which was immediately understood and verified by other elderly with whom I met.

In the second part of the chapter I have corralled together the content of some conversations I had with Jim whilst on an outing to the sea. The narrative brings to the foreground the conclusions of utilising learned strategies and experience to service current needs. They also reveal how, through memory, Jim was able to maintain a sense of continuity and, despite his failing health, a positive orientation to life.

Introduction to Jim and Jean

Sandra, the warden of Phillip House, pointed out Jim and his wife, Jean, as prospective candidates for my research. Jim, a minister retired from a Dunfermline Church, had already written a small book about some aspects of his life's work and he had articulated a wish to record his autobiography before he died. We were introduced, late one morning, after his daily bath. Jean met me at the entrance door to their flat.

"Come on in," she said with a warm smile, "Sandra's told us a little about you." I went through the hall into the living room and over to the arm-chair where Jim was sitting propped up with cushions to assist him to hold his head in place. His face registered only the shadow of a smile but his eyes were keen and discerning. Jim suffered from hydrocephalus and Jean from leukaemia. Since the symptoms of Jean's illness could be controlled more efficiently than Jim's, however, his illness was considerably more disabling and Jean his constant life support.

On some days Jim was barely able to move. Sandra had told me that he had been going through a "bit of a bad patch", with a change in medication. During these periods, where his illness seemed to engulf him, both Sandra and Jean said that he withdrew into himself and spent long periods without speaking.

We arranged to meet in a week's time. I would telephone and confirm the time and date when I returned home.

One week later I arrived at Phillip House and Sandra met me at the main door. "Jim's really lookin' forward tae ye comin'," she said with an air of excitement. "Ah think that jest the idea that he's gaun tae be daein' somethin' usefou has helped him a'ready".

I realised that I was at the centre of a plan. If it worked, our meeting would be mutually advantageous; for Jim, the project of reminiscing would help to 'bring him out of himself".

Jean showed me into the flat and I approached Jim's chair, placing myself in his line of vision as he had difficulty turning his head.

"Guid morn," he said in a welcoming gesture as we shook hands. "Ah didna expect tae see ye here again! Ah thocht ye wid hae decided nae tae come back."

"Ah, no, that was the very last thought on my mind" I replied, wondering how many times Jim had been let down before.

I sat down on the sofa, beside Jim, spreading the wares of my profession - notebook, pens, tape recorder, spare tapes and batteries - on the cushion beside me. Jean bustled around the kitchen making tea.

"Do you object to being recorded?" I asked.

"Not at a'".

"Then we'll get going".

An account of emerging personal identity

I met Jim and Jean for a recording session on three occasions during the first summer. During the autumn I went to visit Jim in the respite care unit, when Jean was away receiving treatment for her leukaemia and, on these occasions, we followed up our discussion without a tape recorder.

I would meet Jean at many of the social activities provided for residents at Phillip House, but Jim's illness prevented him from attending any of these. He was confined to the flat.

Jim was a philosopher. I spent many hours listening not only to the recall of his life, but his thoughts on a whole host of other topics. These sessions were taxing for both of us. Jim tired easily and, on some days, he felt unable to communicate at all whilst I often had to strain to hear and understand what he had to say. Often, Jean would take over as his spokesperson and, as Jim sat silently and Jean chatted freely and energetically about his past, it seemed that an invisible umbilical cord co-ordinated the transfer of thoughts from one to the other. An extraordinary collective resonance emerged during such times.

Jim had already clarified his understanding of himself and his family and his life. He accepted the way things were. He had refined the raw shape his life had inherited into a personal pattern. His memories were a series of time-locked moments - stretching his mind over seven decades to clasp them again. More than any of the other people with whom I spent time, I was conscious that here was a man who was meeting himself again. In his unimaginable self, suddenly he was there again exposed as he peeled another layer of self away, a process described so vividly by Norman MacCaig in his poem 'Summer Farm':

'Self under self, a pile of selves I stand
Threaded on time'

I was anxiously aware that my job was to use a tool as crude as the written word to convey to others this person - his self. In the evenings, as I transcribed the conversations, I was aware of an admittance to defeat. What I thought of Jim and remembered of him were indefinite evocations that seemed to elude transcriptions to the written word. My writing of him was no more than a scribble in the margins of an uncompleted manuscript. As I wrote our conversations on paper, instead of becoming more alive, the man himself seemed to disappear and the content of the conversations lost their depth. There was so much of Jim buried, as it were, from sight; from the time we first met, to now, I continuously readjusted my judgement; I was conscious that he was overspilling my every measure.

The other residents knew that I spent more time with Jim than I did with them, but they respected Jean too much to complain publicly. Integration for the couple had at first been difficult, not only because Jim stayed permanently in the flat and Jean had to be there to look after him, but because others contrived for them a distance, which they neither desired nor knew how to discharge, based on the roles they had previously occupied. Even after one year, Jean was still addressed by her surname despite her efforts to encourage the use of her first name. Perhaps this was partly because she was English and her southern English accent immediately identified her as different. Jim, born in a blacksmith's cottage and brought up in Kelty, had been one of ten children of a mining family. He understood the other residents' formality in terms of the attitudes with which his own family had greeted his intention to join the Ministry, many years before.

"Ma family wurn't tae keen - ye see ma faither wanted me to be a minin' manager, ken. They had this idea that tae become a Minister wis reachin' fur the sun, moon an' the stars - like a doctor, like a lawyer. They didna think Ah had it in me. They couldnae hae dreamt that it wid ever happen"

What follows are extracts from my recordings and conversations with Jim and Jean. Deciding what to include and what to exclude was a painfully difficult process. Any research which undertakes to understand the lives of people in the context of the lives they have lived necessarily delivers an enormous wealth of material. I have tried to preserve the couple's exact words; when conversations were not taped I reconstructed them immediately after they had taken place. Their application to the theme of past experience and selfhood emerges here and in later chapters.

Leaving childhood behind

It was a warm spring morning. I had reached the stage where I felt that I could ask Jim virtually any question. He was always very gentle with his responses, criticising neither the content nor the perspective of my questions; only on occasion asking me to clarify what I was asking.

Jean walked in with a tray bursting with cups and saucers, teapot, milk jug, sugar and plate of biscuits. I got up to help but she gestured towards me to remain seated.

"Please just carry on." She placed a cup of tea and two chocolate biscuits beside Jim.

"Whit's on yer mind taeday? Whit sort o' questions are ye gaun tae ask us?" Jim looked at me quizzically. It was apparent that he was tired. Getting going was not always easy. The following conversation was typical.

"Well, I have a question I would like to ask you but I also wondered if there was anything you would like to talk about," I replied.

"Weel, ye tell me whit it is ye want, an' then Ah'll tell ye whit's on ma mind. It's a' tae dae wi the war, mind. The D Day commemorations hae brocht it a' back." Fifty years on we were in the midst of commemorations for D Day 1944.

"My question is that, since you came from a mining family, Jim, how is it that you ended up as a Minister?"

Jim smiled."Weel, Ah'll tell ye! An' the war had something tae dae wi it so that'll suit us baith!

"Whin Ah wis fourteen Ah decided that Ah wid try tae follow ma faither's principles. He wanted me tae be a minin' manager. He wanted me tae ken the job frae screenin' the coal tae brushin' oot the store. Every aspect had tae be mastered. An' Ah wis daein' this job an' Ah wis daein' that until Ah wis seventeen an' a hauf. An' then Ah had a break.

"Ah thocht, 'this is no' fur me'. Ah had this idea Ah should become a Minister. Ah hadna got ony real qualifications an' Ah didna hae ony real gift other than bein' sincere an' desirous. But Ah had this urge in masel. In the (coal) washin' plant....Ah wis urgin' masel' on tae be a preacher...an' when Ah wis gaun roon greasin' an' oilin', Ah wid talk alood an' nae be heard by onybdy, because the machine wis stronger than ma voice.

"Ah wis disgruntled an' dissatisfied, as so many young people are at times, an' Ah joined the army - the Royal Army Medical Corps. Ah wanted tae dae somethin' serviceable, something usefou.

"It so happened, when Ah got intae the army - the RAMC, Ah wisnae happy an' Ah realised Ah'd made a mistake. Ma brither, wha wis three year aulder, had got some money an' he bocht me oot o' the army in nineteen thirty eight. So Ah wis quite relieved tae be free o' the oath an' the order o' the army.

"He signed on for three years originally," explained Jean.

"So that wis me free frae ma oath. Is that richt?" Jim asked.

"Well I don't know," Jean replied. Then, by way of explanation to both of us, "I've only heard this story recently."

"Ma faither wisnae a miner. He wis a blacksmith at the colliery. He had an ambition tae be a mine manager an' he ne'er quite got there."

"A completely different world to what I knew," said Jean. " I mean, I'm English. He was a blacksmith at the colliery and he saw it as a good opportunity for one of his sons to follow in his footsteps."

Jim interjected. "Ah dinna ken why he fixed on me. Ah've got twa ither brothers, yin three year aulder. Yin three year younger. He focused on me. Mebbe Ah wis the maist potential raw material fur it.

We returned to Jim's career.

"Ah wis in the army fur sixty-three days an' then Ah got ma ticket an' came back oot tae freedom an' went back tae washin' the coal at the washin' plant. Ah wis six an' a hauf year in minin' engineerin'. You see ma faither wanted me tae ken not only the theory o' minin' but tae ken, frae practical experience, everything it entailed. So if ye were intae a situation whaur there wis a breakdown an' ye were telt by miners that the job couldna be done ye telt them tae stan' by an' ye'd show them whit tae dae."

He sighed deeply. "Ma faither wis like a lot o' men: he wis fond o' the bottle, an' Ah wis, at the age o' fourteen - whit ye might say - converted, an' Ah had a strong affinity fur the Church an' he...", he tailed off.

"Jim very obviously disapproved of his drinking," explained Jean. "That's why probably the need to get away. Jim's father was a lovely man. I only knew him as a

mellow man. He was almost retired. Couldn't even go out then, could he Jim? He was never a violent man was he?"

"Like Ah am noo!" Jim jested.

"Mellow and mild. Yes, he was a nice man. I loved him. But, I think when they were all growing up, I can understand their crossness with him, because they were a lovely big family who all did very well for themselves, all had good jobs and all strived to better themselves and I think they perhaps thought he let them down. He wasn't a violent man. He just drank until senseless and slept it off."

"What about your mother?" I asked Jim.

"Ma mither wis wonderful! She wis absolutely wonderful. A big woman an' strong-willed. But it sae happened Ah had this yearnin' fur the Ministry..."

"It was entirely foreign to them," Jean picked up his train of thought. "The whole idea....there had never been a Minister in the family. Never been anybody connected to the Church. Though they were good strong Presbyterian people they didn't actually go to the church.

"I think the crux of it was that, against all the odds, he kept this dream alive. He had absolutely no encouragement at all."

"Naw, they didna think Ah wis Minister material."

"Loved him dearly as a brother," continued Jean, "but just thought he was crazy to pursue this. Hoped he would get it out of his system."

"In nineteen thirty nine war broke out an' Ah wis conscripted. Ah wid hae bin exempt because o' bein' in the mines but Ah didna persist because Ah thocht this wid be the way oot tae clarify ma thochts an' tae see the way Ah had tae go." He explained. "Ah wis tryin' tae find the way, nae o' escape but o' service."

War

On January 17th 1940, along with several thousand others, Jim was conscripted. The men were taken from Glasgow to Hawick where they were billeted for six weeks. They prepared to meet the Germans. They were moved by train down south, through London to Plymouth and then to Cherbourg in France.

"A vast number of soldiers arrayed, ready an' prepared tae attack the Germans", said Jim. "These units were mair or less marshalled fur strategic strike. The thing is...when Ah wis gaun across there were thousands o' people runnin' awa. Ah think that really made me angry wi the Germans. Tae see a' these auld women an' young women runnin' helplessly in the opposite direction. That really wis the beginning o' ma - Ah willna say hatred - ma feelin' o repulsion against the Germans. An' Ah thocht, richt, they're gaun that way; we're gaun this way. We'll stop them."

"Did you feel more anger than fear?" I asked

"Aye. Och aye! Ah wis gaun tae tear them tae pieces, ye ken, fur whit they were daein tae these auld women - these young women. It sort o' reviled me tae think that helpless people should be sae intimidated...terrified."

Quietly, Jean spoke. "It came over yesterday how young they were. I mean, they would only have been, in nineteen forty, twenty years old," said Jean.

"A' the conscripts - around twenty - young an' daft!" said Jim.

"They weren't going to die" Jean emphasized, referring to how the young men must have felt. "They weren't really in that sense brave. It couldn't happen to them. They weren't going to die. They were too young."

"Ye smoke-filled crowd who cheer an' wave
When soldiers' last masks are passin'
Go hame an' pray ye'll never know
The hell where youth an' laughter go."

Jim recited this verse as though he had been repeating it every day for the last fifty years. Then he spoke. "There's nocht tae be glorified in war".

We were silent for a moment. "They'd ne'er seen deid people, these young men. They'd never seen the deid - they thought they were sleeping. "Whit's he daein' sleepin'?" But they were deid.. they'd never come across deid people. They were tae young tae hae seen deid people. They couldnae really believe it wis happenin' tae them."

Jim and Jean had been watching some of the D Day remembrance events on TV. "We were supposed tae be sae brave," Jim said sadly. "We were nae brave at a'. Ye got caught up wi it a'." He turned his head away. "Ah kept thinkin' of oor youngest gaun intae that. Nocht could prepare ye fur that."

Jim went on to explain how his own mission to become a Minister was deeply influenced by his war experience. He was in the Sixth Battalion Scottish Rifles for more than six years and, during that time, he studied: books on world religion, the Christian idea of God and the mission of the Church.

"Nae matter how guid ye might be as a minin' engineer, as a Minister you could mak endless help, tae knowing the fowk. To me this was the maist gratifyin' thing - tae be able tae pass on the idea o' the love o' God fur everybdy, an' tae pass it on. Rather than lessenin' the value o' the strength o' life, it added tae it.

"An' so that wis why Ah wanted tae be a Minister. The work that ye wid dae as a Minister has a lastin' value, whauras the work ye dae as a minin' engineer may bring ye in X pounds extra but it widna bring life comfort. In the war ye had been a help an' a guide tae many suffering souls. An' so Ah wanted tae - very much in masel - tae be a preacher."

The interruption of their youth by war was a historical stratum common to all the older people whom I met. Jim's story was unique not so much by virtue of the first hand account of his war experience but that it provided the means by which he broke out of a mould and left mining for ministry. Given the degree of job change that takes place today it is difficult to fully comprehend the significance of this achievement. During Jim's childhood mining was the central cultural referent by which his life, his family and friends were represented; the war and maturity in the post-war years had led to a marked difference between his earlier orientation and that in later life. Yet so deeply embedded were some of the cultural values he held and so often did Jim reconstruct his memories to reflect his current priorities that the differences seemed scarcely significant. The final part of this chapter documents a conversation I had with Jim during a summer trip to the sea. The purpose of documenting this conversation is twofold. Firstly it indicates the strategies that Jim now drew upon to service his current needs. Secondly, it provides incontrovertible evidence of the use of memories and reconstructions to maintain a sense of personal continuity that in itself confirmed a positive orientation to life. In the pursuit of the preservation of identity Jim drew deeply from his reservoir of experience; in so doing he unconsciously transmitted his own cultural values across the generations.

'Yer a Scot an' it's burned intae yer bones'

It was late summer and a few weeks later. The sun was high in the sky as I made my way to the coast with Jim and Jean and a helper from the Jean Mackie Centre[1]. We had not intended to go far and we sought the pale sands at the beach at Burntisland; Jim locked into his wheelchair and locked into the van, his sunglasses reflecting off the inside window.

At Burntisland we found that the car park was almost full, even though it was a weekday and out of the holiday season. We parked further from the beach than we desired, thinking with some anxiety that, once out of the van, it might be difficult to manoeuvre Jim's bulky chair over the rough ground. Out in the open air, passers-by ignoring us, we steered cautiously; the gentle gradient down towards the sea helping our descent. As we walked Jim recalled how special Burntisland had been for him as a child. Even on a summer's day I found it exceptionally hard, as a stranger, to feel excited about the town. Burntisland seemed shapeless and unattractive; old before its time. On the sea course winding its way round the bay the path's rough gravel and dirty grass fought for room with dog excrement, cigarette packets, and fish supper newspaper tossed down, and rank rosebay willow herb and nettles sprawling in more sheltered corners. It was sure to be worse out of season, I thought, immediately chastising myself for my inability to view my surrounds in a more charitable light.

In the past it had been different. During the summer fair weeks, Jim described how certain parts of the East Neuk were awash with visitors from as far afield as Glasgow and Dundee. It was where 'Maw, Da and the bairns' went. The men came in their suits and braces; their wives in unfamiliar and tight frocks; the children flushed and excited, brandishing buckets and spades and hours of energy. Jim's family and fellow miners had come to Burntisland on their annual 'day oot' - the miners withdrawing to the pubs and the children to the sea. The streets bustled with holiday-makers, photographers with monkeys on their shoulders and sweet and candy vendors; the public houses overflowed with *bonhomie*.

The day had provided the zenith of excitement. From the car park the sea view was obscured by a long dark viaduct running parallel with the water. The paths radiating

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[1] The Jean Mackie Centre, based in Dunfermline, is a centre for the elderly providing, among other things, a meeting point; a cafeteria; activities such as arts and crafts classes, music and song; lectures given by outside speakers; and a respite unit.

from the car park led the bairns towards tunnels in the viaduct: from a distance they appeared as black holes in the brickwork. It was only when the children arrived at the tunnel's opening that the silver of the sea suddenly opened up in front. Like the light at the end of the proverbial tunnel, how much more inviting was the sea seen through the eye-piece of the tunnel. For the children, Jim said, it was like looking down through a telescope and suddenly finding what you had been looking for come into vision.

As Jim was talking we arrived at the mouth of the tunnel and saw the very sight that he had witnessed as a child. Our experienced minds adjusted far too easily and we all felt the sense of anti-climax as the silver sphere ahead filled our vision. We progressed through the tunnel and parked the wheelchair on some short dry turf just before the grassy overhang gave way to the first drift line on the beach. The pungent smell of sea and seaweed, mingled with wood smoke, rushed headlong with the onshore breeze. This aerial language, soaked with memory, washed soundlessly over us.

We sat silently, looking out over the water, the sun reflecting in a multitude of silver patterns, shafts of light barely penetrating the depths. The grass behind us was peppered with family groups and picnic bags and young children digging in the sand and exploring in the warm haze to search the rock pools and create their own worlds in the novel one of sand and sea life. Perhaps to Jim they were like ancestral ghosts passing within sight of the eyes of his recollection.

The scene suggested that memory belongs to the world of its analogues - in this case the sea. Memory inhabits external things as well as the internal regions of the human psyche. For Jim the summer day together with the sea scent animated his reveries of recollection. I knew how readily the firing of the senses could transport the thoughts backward through time. Some years after returning from a spell in Africa I was turning out some cupboards and found a pair of boots that I had worn there. The African soil still lingered on the soles of the boots and the smell of the earth - which had no parallel in Britain - immediately transported me back to Africa and to previously forgotten events and fleeting regrets. For Marcel Proust (quoted in Harrison, 1992:186) the taste of a madelaine brought to life a lost era of his childhood; for John MacIntosh (1993), in his poem *Auld Galligaskins*, the demolition of the old miners' row of his childhood, to make way for a wide new street, amounted to the devastation of the memory that inhabited the place where the cottages had stood for generations. Harrison writes that 'when the analogues of memory disappear from a

person's world, sense perception can no longer conspire with recollection to restore a forgotten past' (1992:186). When memory pervades the ordinary perception of objects then the elder can feel liberated from the otherwise deathly quality of mere chronological time. Giacomo Leopardi refers to 'the second sort of objects' which accompany the perception of simple objects and belong to the reservoir of personal memory. In his notes from 1828 he writes:

> To the sensitive and imaginative man, who lives, as I have lived for a long time, feeling and imagining continuously, the world and its objects are in a certain sense double. He will see with his eyes a tower, a countryside; he will hear with his ears the sound of a bell; and at the same time with his imagination he will see another tower, another countryside, he will hear another sound. In this second sort of objects lies all the beauty and pleasure of things. Sad is the life (and yet such is life for the most part) that hears, sees, senses only simple objects [namely] those of which eyes, ears and the other senses receive a mere sensation.
>
> 30 Novembre, 1 Domenica dell' Avento, *Zibaldone*, 1162

The sight of the sea tunnel at Burntisland evoked in Jim's mind an image of the same place and the same context, but at a different moment in time. As the two images fused together through psychological association, the horizon of perception took on another dimension. It was enough to recall an earlier perception of the same sea tunnel to experience the effect of doubleness that Leopardi describes above. This sort of 'poetic experience' of the world and its objects belongs to the deepest core of human experience in general.

Although we had decided to make the most of an unseasonally warm day, Jim's intention was to continue to fill in the remaining paragraphs of his life and story. I was not sure where to start and so I asked him about the values he thought Scots people held and what it meant to be Scottish.

Jim pondered this complex request.

"In Scotland, when Ah wis younger, an' e'en still taeday it lingers, unless ye had an academic qualification ye weren't considered tae be educated. And unless ye had the whaurwithal - again - ye weren't o' much consequence. That's hoo it's ayeways bin." His comments reminded me of those contributed earlier by Bertha and Fergus on the subject of learning.

"In Scotland, education has bin the premium. Sometimes it's put in advance o' real worth because ye can hae academic qualifications an' be nae much cop in a practical set up. But tae hae the theory an' tae hae the practice thegither is something that Ah think Ah wid commend tae be 'the be all an' the end all' - that ye were an a'-roon person - wi a like mind an' a generous spirit - that tae me is wealth. Dae ye agree?"

He turned painfully towards me, his moon-shaped and lined face made beautiful by the grave illuminations of the ideas behind it.

"I agree totally," I assented.

"The thing is, we are whit we are an'..." he paused. "Character is whit ye are, whit ye *really* are, an' that, tae me, is the maist important thing aboot any one of us. Whit we are in oor deepest self."

Jim's views were the consequence of a steady building project throughout life. His profoundest ideas, once toys on the floor, had been remodelled, loved, painted, varnished and now sealed.

"What do you think of being Scottish and what that means as against any other nationality."

"Och, Ah think that if yer a Scot yer a Scot an' it's burned intae yer bones. Ye jest cannae help it."

Looking towards the tunnel in the viaduct as if seeking help, Jim deftly moved on.

"Ah hae a great flair, the noo, fur Rabbie Burns an' Ah've bin tryin' tae convert yin or twa people tae see the worth o' the bard.

"A' they can think aboot is a man who loved the bottle...the women...they dinna seem tae realise that he wis a child of his age." Jim shook his head slowly.

"But he wis a master in the gems of expression an' he had a Scottish backgroond - which came through very vividly.

"He's got a poem o' Jean Armour an' Ah quote it tae ma wife because her name's Jean. An' it goes like this - an' Ah dinna think ye c'd beat this: not as a man lookin' upon a woman or as a husband an' wife thegither."

Then, without pausing, easily and unhurriedly he spoke:

"It is na Jean, thy bonnie face
Nor shape that I admire;
Altho' thy beauty and thy grace
Might weel awauk desire.

Something, in ilka part o' thee,
To praise, to love, I find,
But dear as is thy form to me,
Still dearer is thy mind.

Nae mair ungenerous wish I hae,
Nor stronger in my breast,
Than, if I canna make thee sae,
At least to see thee blest.

Content I am, if heaven shall give
But happiness to thee;
And as wi' thee I wish to live,
For thee I'd bear to die.

"Noo - cou'd ye improve on that? Ah couldna! Flawless! Great, meaningful stuff ye ken!? We ken he wrote some trash - some vulgar stuff. We ken that he wis a child of his age and that he really could let his hair doon an' say the boldest an' blackest things - but then, that's pairt o' the man. His works are immortal."

Jim paused and then, with undisguised disgust, he said. "An' ye get some faulsie - a total layaboot - sayin', 'Ah dinna care fur the man', an' ask him tae quote a poem or e'en sing yin o' his songs. Thae couldnae dae it!

"That, tae me, is small-mindedness, mean-mindedness. But tae be able tae see in ithers - even if they've bin blaggards - some o' the guid that's there. Ye see, there's gold among the dross." For a second time, Jim quoted Burns.

"The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that."

"Most of us are looking for the bad things?" I asked.

"This is true. This is true," Jim acquiesced.

"But most of us can't find any answers as to why the bad things in life happen," I prompted.

"The eternal why?" Jim looked out to sea.

"Why dis God let this happen?" he continued with a further question and then furnished the answer himself. "There's nae easy answer...speakin' aboot things that cannae really be measured in temporal terms. God wis in Christ, reconciling people tae himself, not imputing their sins...receiving them in love an' guidness." With the move to theological language Jim moved onto safer ground.

"The aulder ye become - this is ma experience - ye find that tae know a' is tae forgie a'. Ah mean sometimes ye make snap judgements an' they're warped because they're snap: they're nae considered; they're nae kind, because tae be generous, tae be broadminded, is a wonderful gift."

Almost as an afterthought Jim turned to me : "It's nae jest a gift. It's somethin' that we cultivate".

"Do you think, with age, it's easier to tolerate, to understand?" I asked, trying to draw out more.

""Aye, that's it. Ah think as ye get aulder ye become mair mellow. Ye become mair tolerant an' understanding."

"Not expecting to change the world?" I asked.

"Naw. Ye make a nice liveable contribution. Ah'm talkin' noo efter years o' experience in the Ministry. Years o' experience in hamelife - because we had a big family.....

"Ye get maist oot o' life if ye're unselfish."

This reflective narrative of Jim's was his message of learning and resourcefulness and survival. Unlike that of Bertha and Fergus, it was not about the physical dimensions of how to live one's life - making ends meet, producing two where others, who were less skilled, would have produced one; Jim's creative strategy was an emotional, psychological and spiritual response to the hardships of his life. And the response and the resource had developed to become one and the same.

"Do you think," I asked my next question seeking I wasn't sure what. "If you could ever live any part of your life over again would you?"

"Nae really. Nae really," Jim replied without hesitation "Ah've bin very fortunate. Lookin' back, things could hae gone strangely wrang, but didna gae wrang. Lookin' back Ah think Ah've bin very fortunate. Fortunate in ma choice o' wife, fortunate wi bairns, fortunate wi Churches Ah had as a Minister. So, on the whole, Ah dinna think that Ah wid want tae..." he broke off and sighed. "Ah mean mebbe, on reflection, Ah widna hae wanted tae go through some o' the hard times - there's bin some hard times ye know. But that wid hae bin movin' awa fae reality. If ye dinna hae the bad times ye cou'dna enjoy the guid times. But, on the whole Ah wid say Ah've bin weel-used an' bless'd." Perhaps that was the secret - to feel that one had been well-used rather than abused, under-used or merely used in life. The conversation had drawn to a natural close. Jim looked away, lost in thought, almost discernibly navigating his way through the winter's ice.

I felt admiration for this old man who had the ability to accept necessity and make it part of himself. We moved slowly back to the waiting van. The casual afternoon's outing had been turned into a manifesto for living.

Epilogue

Later that year I returned alone to Burntisland. I parked in the now empty carpark and revisited the spot where Jim had sat in his wheelchair gifting his thoughts to me. A grey haar hung closely over the water and the beach looked neglected - a flat littoral foreshore of rock and stone and reeking seaweed, strewn with the flotsam and jetsam of the summer and devoid of people. The lazy movement of the tide in the cold stillness, without the presence of Jim, gave the place a quality of mysterious power. By the time I had returned through the tunnel and back to my car that spot had impressed the image of itself on me with a force greater than words: all a part of Jim's personal charisma.

Concluding comments

Shared assumptions and expectations about how an individual life should be lived are part of every society. They include: stages and timing of biological and social development; patterns of socialization; work and leisure; requirements of family life; opportunities of gender; and socio-economic position (Kaufman, 1986:166). These shared assumptions are an individual's cultural heritage - the normative ideas about the shape and meaning of the individual life course - referred to by David Plath (1980:14) as 'pathways' and by Robert LeVine (1980:82) as 'life plans'. Jim's pathway had provided the context for personal reflection and identity formulation throughout his life span. What he related to me was his ideas about the course his life had taken *in relation* to ideal pathways (Kaufman, 1986:167). His pathway had been one of maintenance through spiritual sustenance; holding onto social and spiritual status in the face of great odds. He interpreted this relationship - between his development and cultural ideas - to formulate a sense of self for the present and to negotiate a meaningful future, however short.

Together with the evidence of the previous chapter, Jim's expositions directly addressed issues of change. More significantly, in the context of a sense of continuity in old age, they flagged up the possible threats to this continuity by the value changes that Jim and Jean had witnessed within society. Yet, although Jim was aware of the changes that had occurred around him, his own experiences of war followed by pastoral and ministerial work had allowed him to recognize a continuing role in

which his own meanings and values were not just still worthy of transmission but were still relevant. This was a feature concluded also by Musgrove (1977) who, recognising ministers as victims of secularization and, therefore, often seen as 'marginal' people, sought to find out whether they did indeed feel that they had moved into a marginal world, occupying careers that were irrelevant to the contemporary world. In this context, one might believe it possible for Jim to 'suffer' from the double marginality of being old and being a minister. Not only did Musgrove conclude, however, that ministers enjoy a 'central' status (1977:62) but, further, that what was remarkable about them was not 'transformation of identity' but continuity (1977:62). Jim was sensitised to the problems of the human condition, recognising that social advancement, technological innovation, the development of information and systems and the concept of the global village could not by themselves provide for the abstract but vital moral values and religious practices underlying generational cultures. In this sense, I was aware that despite the context of change and the loss of a coherent culture the sharing of accrued attributes such as wisdom and self-transcendence in old age was still possible.

There was a further truth revealed within Jim's conversations. Certain generations have collective memories that are radically different from other generations (Turner, 1995:251); memories which are features of what Durkheim (1938) intended by the phrase 'conscience collective'. Each generation qualifies for a special significance for those who are of that generation: those who grew up as children of the Sixties signify themselves through the Beatles, the age of permissiveness, flower power and so on; those of the Twenties, who survived the trenches of the First World War, 'believed that their own terrible and wonderful experiences gave them powers which would influence the world for generations to come.' (Blythe, 1979:156). But of course how could these? When one thought about Jim's experiences of the war it seemed that, whilst they may have been sacred to him, it was this very characteristic that was almost impossible for him to convey to me and probably to any person who had not lived through the same. Although, perhaps not the war, as such, but what Blythe refers to as its 'formalised mystery. The matters of life and death - the matters of fact of war - are not in themselves mysterious, but their power to shape and determine a person's life are' (1979:156).

Section 3

Reconstructions of Identity

Where have all the long days gone
When there was time for everything
For love and sleep and waking
And even working.
There was time to plan the great lives we would have
And now we've had them.
Now I know
My father bought the food
And mother cooked it
Our care was for ourselves
And theirs for us
They had too little time for love and sleep and walking
But lots for working.

The Long Days, In: A Little Piece of Earth, Jean Mackie

Chapter 7

Obstacles to resolving the dualism of maintaining personal continuity and coping with change

The scope of this section

The articulation and expression of the dialectic of change and continuity is a theme pursued throughout this study. In this section, however, the major discontinuity rendered by the move into sheltered accommodation is addressed. As I remarked in the introduction to chapter 5, this is an example of a third historical-geographical layer feeding into contemporary culture. Two aspects are considered. The first is the extent to which their changed living circumstances, an obvious sort of discontinuity or rite of passage, encourage an emphasis among older people for constructing continuity between their current situation and previous experience. For example, if their earlier lives were lived in what could legitimately be described as an occupational community (Crow and Allan, 1994:26-32) - mining, linen, farming, railways - what aspects, if any, of life within this sort of community might be translated through to life beyond, when the occupational community as primary cultural referent no longer exists?

The second aspect is the extent to which the rite of passage is an induction into a new kind of social membership and the form that this takes. Myerhoff claims that rites of passage reflect and enhance rather than cause social integration (1984:314) whilst Edith Turner reminds us that rites do not merely reflect socio-structural laws; sometimes they break them (1992:6). The outward expression of the rite of passage is addressed by the study of the initiation of the elderly into the bodies of people at each complex and the construction of the terms of social membership. By drawing attention to the realities of life within each sheltered home I show how, in response to both internally and externally driven circumstances, radically different kinds of social membership are created among those who live in or make use of their facilities.

Introduction

Life at both Windsor Court and Phillip House was geared, at its most basic, towards negotiating the master transitions from the institutional categories of 'carer' to 'cared for', for women, and 'worker' to 'retired' for men. The process by which these visible master transitions operated was crucially dependent upon the imperatives of old age

which, as Chapter 4 emphasised, pulled in two directions at once. On the one hand there was an inner urge to preserve continuity in the face of constraint in the outside world; on the other hand, new requirements leading to different ways of relating to the world. It is argued by Biggs that the existence of this dualism implies a need among the elderly 'to come to a workable compromise with the dominant social reality' (1993:52) in order for positive definitions of social integration and personal identity to remain intact. How this compromise materialised, if at all, was subject to structural inequalities which perpetuated an already existing process acting to marginalise who they were, both as individuals and as the elderly.

The purpose of this chapter is to argue that difficulties in resolving the dualism described above, and its severity, consist of structurally created obstacles, together with dominant ideologies that, directly or indirectly, occupy a central role in the creation and management of those obstacles. I am concerned primarily with two aspects: on the one hand, the role of the housing wardens and other care managers; on the other, prevailing socio-cultural conditioning. For reasons that will become apparent during the following three chapters, my focus is almost exclusively limited to the social scene at Windsor Court. Phillip House is left to a later discussion in Chapter 9.

I look first at the role played by the care managers in the context of the creation of obstacles that encourage marginalisation. This then leads to an exploration of the consequences in which the marginal position of the elderly at the sheltered complex becomes a defining characteristic of their members.

The role of the wardens

The wardens' authority

Although considered by their residents as a 'last hame' Windsor Court and Phillip House were also environments in which progress, albeit in terms of managing increasing biological deterioration, was taking place against the stable reference point of the wardens, from whom authority emanated.

Fused within each complex's daily activities and much of what was said was a set of referential meanings associated with getting older and with approaching death. Life in the sheltered home led to inexorable changes in previously ascribed roles. For the residents it meant learning to begin to separate themselves from past lives, from the roles and relationships they may once have had, and from the outside world. In addition,

their bodies were undergoing irreversible change through gradual physical deterioration - a fact which was felt more keenly among those who were unwell. The services provided, in the form of home and health care, were of practical assistance to these processes of change, but they could not replace the emotional and continuous practical support of family and friends belonging to the past, a reality which is dealt with at length in Chapter 10. The resident was reminded daily of her finite nature, a future no longer bright with promise.

The attributes attached to the new identity of 'resident of the sheltered home' were also signifiers of group identity and subject to evaluation by others. In this context, it was often the wardens who, as significant 'others', so crucially determined the evaluation of group identity, achieved and ascribed. This affected the likelihood of residents having access to resources that might enhance their chances of living a satisfactory existence. More importantly, as Biggs points out, the ideologies arising from such structurally created opportunities 'reflect the circumstances of social beings and contribute to the same patterns being reproduced' (1993:83). As the dominant parties within each residence, the wardens contributed to dominant ideologies that both helped to maintain their own status and to convince everybody else that this state of affairs was both just and desirable. The patterns of institutional living that developed at each were dependent on the existence of quite different prevailing ideologies. In turn this led, as I will reveal in following chapters, to very different kinds of social scenes at each housing complex and, consequently, to very different kinds of lives being led.

The role of the wardens was critical to the submergence of the process of ageing. In their fifties, they were, at both complexes, symbolic representations of 'homeliness' and 'youthfulness'. Some of the residents, particularly if they never went outside the sheltered home (and that was the case for three residents at Windsor Court), were able to live vicariously through the wardens' experiences, although the limited degree of interaction between residents and wardens there, as argued below, diminished this important source of being in old age (Okely, 1994).

The absence of senior male staff at both complexes[1], was a feature observed at other similar establishments by Hockey (1990:108). This helped to maintain a symbolically homely environment - paralleling women's naturalised care work within the family. The

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1 although the relief warden at Phillip House was male

presence of only one full-time female member of staff, the warden, was in keeping with the low status 'homely' rather than the high status 'medical'. It was one where suffering which fell outside the limits of the medical model was managed.

The effect of the wardens' authority at Windsor Court

At both Windsor Court and Phillip House the wardens effectively retained within their own hands the power of the expression of life within the complex. However, as noted above, this resulted in very different social scenes at each. During communal events at Windsor Court dialogue and interplay led, almost always, to resolution into two teams. All at once, at coffee, it was as though the elders were *guests* of the wardens. It was as though, for a short time, Windsor Court was the wardens' home and the women were merely being hosted there. The wardens had to be seen to be 'daein' whilst the residents were permitted to sit, daydream and even doze. Through this sort of control the perception of 'belonging' among residents at Phillip House, described in chapter 3, was dramatically reversed at Windsor Court. Here, the wardens determined the information the residents were able to acquire and therefore influenced their ability to interact and co-operate and to develop any sense of community

Social distance between wardens and residents at Windsor Court

The wardens' authority was expressed in their social and spatial distance from residents. During coffee mornings they would remove themselves to a tight-knit circle away from the residents, at the opposite side of the communal room. Similarly, except at special ceremonial occasions such as the Christmas dinner, they would drink from different cups and eat from different plates. Sometimes when they had been involved in carrying out physical tasks such as cooking or cleaning, they would wear nylon aprons, but at coffee mornings they waited on the residents wearing ordinary day clothes of skirts and blouses - in this respect 'dressing for the occasion' rather than making any token gesture of conformity.

Together with social workers from outside, the wardens formed a secret society in so far as a secret was kept as to how they were operating together to maintain a particular definition of the situation.

It is a widely held notion that the maintenance of social distance can generate and maintain awe. The inhibitions evident between women at the coffee morning and between wardens and women allowed each individual some elbow room in building up

the impression she wanted to give. Behind the awe there lay a sense of secret mysteries: wardens were empowered with various forms of control which might influence the climate of day to day life. If a resident felt, for any reason, that the warden disliked her, this would make her life at Windsor Court a little less bearable and thus it was in her interests to maintain a positive relationship. Reasons for like and dislike may have been very petty and may have themselves depended on existential circumstances over which a resident had no control, but the resident had no way of knowing this.

The degree of social distance from the residents allowed the wardens to remove themselves from the evidence of increasing human frailty around them. They were to some extent responsible for the medical and administrative control of the conditions of the residents, having authority to draw directly upon the expertise of outside agencies such as doctors and the hospital.

The principal warden, Betty, lived in her own flat within the complex and thus was available during any emergencies. Her office, located at the centre of the housing complex, was opposite the front door which received all visitors, all deliveries and was the only door through which residents entered and exited. Although she was in possession of a great deal of medical, social and financial information concerning the individual, she did not have responsibility for residents' possessions. Her authority extended to the provision of emotional care and support to residents; it did not involve her personal involvement in physical care, which was the terrain of nurses, doctors and home helps. Upon the death of a resident, both wardens became active in assisting with funeral arrangements and ensuring transport for other residents to the funeral and arranging the funeral tea.

Despite the range of means available to wardens to provide their own personal support, individual interaction between warden and resident was rare, residents being expected for the most part to provide themselves with emotional support through other means. At group events the wardens could be seen to be interacting with residents, exchanging remarks about the weather, about an individual's health, the interchange being often humorous and cheerful. But in similar style to communication between the care managers at the lunch club and its participants (chapter 4) it was, for the most part, superficial interaction, catering more for the wardens' needs to be distanced from residents' most deeply felt needs, than for these latter to be satisfied.

Discontinuity in cultural conditioning

The consequence of limited interaction among residents at Windsor Court, combined with the institutional structure, ensured that resident participation in making decisions about communal life at Windsor Court was almost non-existent. There did not even seem to exist awareness of the possibility of such participation. Traits that in younger people often lead to material success - leadership, individualism, competitiveness, initiative, future orientation and so on - bring to the older people who manifest them the label of 'maladjusted'. Such reversals in expectation were long ago described by Benedict (1956) as 'discontinuity in cultural conditioning'; and, as Myerhoff (1984:311) has pointed out, this sort of discontinuity is particularly severe in our society.

Among people already vulnerable and needy, perceived loss of control, writes Myerhoff (1979:181), is extraordinarily threatening. Among residents, self control made the appearance of dignity possible and enabled individuals to maintain their standing as people of dignity. The result was that negative emotions were not acceptable, in themselves or others. Hurts and needs had to be resolved outwith the public eye. The insecurity of losing one's standing, one's relatively innocuous position in people's eyes at Windsor Court, combined with the fear of being ostracised and, worst of all, being considered senile, the real attendant of old age, combined to secure a public face of respectability.

The ordinary daily activities which allowed the women to establish routine and order in their lives, combined with the absolute requirement for self-control and dignity, were underlain by what Myerhoff refers to as 'the unspoken, enormous fear of senility' (1979:181) and all its perceived associated characteristics such as incontinence. This is what Mrs Beverley was alluding to (in chapter 3) when she described her feelings about the John Burns Home. Clear-mindedness and self-possession were signs of being intact. And, whilst the ability to make a point, to discuss and to share their views allowed the women to engage in a temporary cohesion of community, there was always an uneasy alliance with the extent to which passion, fierceness or eccentricity may be interpreted as a loss of control. A misplaced handbag, a lapse of memory or illogical reasoning might all be scrutinised as 'ominous portents' (Myerhoff, 1979:181) that the process of decay was beginning.

Structural inequalities

Barbara Myerhoff (1984) has suggested that there is widespread intolerance of 'bad behaviour' among older people; and, in her classic study of culture and ageing, Margaret Clark (1967) has documented what we all perhaps sense: in our society we ask of older people that, above all, they do not make waves. This is all closely related to maintaining a manageable social organisation which is, as Myerhoff (1984) makes clear, easily institutionalised and patronised.

Biggs discusses this sort of outcome in terms of inequalities in the distribution of power in society. He suggests that the hegemony of the dominant ideology makes it extremely difficult 'for competing definitions of social reality to find a voice other than within terms of reference that are already structured in the interests of that dominant group' (1993:83). Whether or not it was in their interests to do so, it seemed that the elderly at Windsor Court had already identified with the dominant ideology so that their marginal position had become a defining characteristic. This socially ascribed marginality gave to them less value and priority. Furthermore, since they did not seem to be actively conscious of their ascribed identities they did what Freire (1972) and Leonard (1984) have identified: which is to increasingly internalise these negative characteristics to the detriment of other potential identities.

At Windsor Court, the promotion of such structural inequality had permeated through to all residents. In limiting interaction to a strict code of acceptable spoken and personal behaviour, residents reinforced the self-image imposed on them by others. This was clearly not just a situation of younger members assigning stereotypical roles such as 'calmness', 'serenity', 'wisdom', 'caring' and so on to older people. The residents were assigning these roles among themselves with devastating consequences on the degree to which they were willing and able to command control.

Potential conflict was, as a result, suppressed. Why expend energy engaging in conflict when the opportunity for change, normally resulting from the resolution of conflict, was unlikely to emerge? There was also something of the 'prisoner's dilemma' illustrated at Windsor Court. The mechanics for strengthening solidarity and broadening mutual trust were missing. Even had a resident been keen to see change in the running of the building or in its activities she would only have made a move had she known that she would be supported in her efforts. Since daily events could not accommodate the feelings of 'connectedness, belonging, participation in a whole, mingling of the self in the group...'

(Kanter, 1972:93) the system failed as a democratic enterprise within which a set of fruitful possibilities of empowerment might emerge.

As the following illustration reveals, the residents considered any communal activity to be the responsibility of the warden. It had been this way for so long, no-one seemed to question the situation. When attempts were made to encourage additional public activities, the wardens would appear to turn a deaf ear. At any rate they did not seem to take such requests seriously, merely confirming their own expectations that the women should sit placidly within the groove they had carved out for them.

Mrs Jamieson and Mrs MacDonald were talking about their need for exercise.

"Ma legs are as stiff as an auld cuddy", said Mrs Jamieson.

"Ye jest need tae keep daein' a wee bit." Mrs MacDonald smiled at me. "Jest tighten the muscles in yer toes an' feet an' relax". She removed her sandals and motioned to me to watch her toes. I watched, fascinated, as she lifted the misshapen crabs of her feet; a barely perceptible movement was visible beneath the skin. "See! It hardly shows but it's daein' sumpin', " she commented.

"Ah jest wish Ah could put some strength back intae ma legs," complained Mrs Jamieson.

"Weel, jest keep daein' this an' soon ye'll be able tae walk", said Mrs MacDonald optimistically. "Ye jest keep daein' it a' the time."

"What about bringing someone in to teach an exercise class?" I asked.

"Ach, they said they'd arrange sumpin', but nocht's happened", Mrs Jamieson replied.

The comment was aimed in Maureen's direction. Like an illustration of their thoughts she walked towards us, but she had not heard or perhaps she had chosen to ignore the comment. She brushed through the entrance door, becoming the diminishing click-clack of the heels of her court shoes along the corridor.

The next week I spoke to Maureen about the possibility of running a class for exercise. "Weel, Ah'm jest the cleaner", she replied. "Ye'll hae tae ask Betty - she's awa on holiday the noo, an' no' back 'til next week, mind".

Intuitively I felt that my suggestion had not met with much enthusiasm and that I had interfered enough; I determined to encourage the residents themselves to take up their own case, but Mrs Jamieson fell gravely ill shortly after and the residue of commitment which had been there seemed to disappear altogether.

Socio-cultural conditioning

Identification with a socially ascribed marginality was one way of ensuring a sense of disempowerment in communal decision-making. A second significant factor which underlay this was the conditioning of the socio-cultural environment from which the residents had come. They had had a lifetime in which to internalise prejudicial attitudes towards old age before becoming the victim of them. In the context of old age the structural inequalities to which I refer above were not simply defining characteristics of their present way of life but most probably contributed to defining characteristics of their own grandparents when they themselves were children. In this sense socio-cultural conditioning comprised not only their version of themselves as children, including their social status and image, but also their construction of old age when they were young and growing up into middle age.

The low social and economic status of the old has received very little critical attention, often being accepted by society as an inevitable consequence of advanced age (Walker, 1991:41), and it is not my purpose here to draw conclusions about how the current old viewed the old when they were children. However, it is possible to make some comment on the contribution of childhood images to socio-cultural conditioning. The residents had emerged from a generation where children were to be 'seen but not heard'. Now, in their final years, their self-acknowledged disempowerment and their silence on issues where they had come to believe that 'others knew best' emulated many of the characteristics of their childhood. It was at the table that, as children, they had learned not just manners but the shape of the world they were to inherit (Gillis, 1996:92). The comment "Jest leave whit ye canna eat" to an anxious upturned face, when a food helping of substantial proportions was set in front of a resident at a midday dinner, elicited merely a relieved and grateful smile, as though this reawakened memories the ways in which their Victorian guardians had used food as a punishment and turned the dinner hour of their youth into school (Gillis, 1996:92).

Wisdom over education was now the accumulation of old age. In 1918 a Fife child's education depended upon the status of his or her family. Fife upper classes sent their children to expensive boarding schools at 13, then to Public School. The middle class

child went to High School at 11 and stayed until 16-18 years. The majority of residents in Windsor Court came from former working class families. They were among the 40% of Fife children who left school before the age of 14 to earn their first housekeeping. Even this area of control over their lives was frequently relinquished, although not without protest. It was not unusual for families to number 12 or 13 children and the elder girls would often be impelled to resign from their first jobs and to return home in order to help their mothers with new members of the family.

Chapter 5 draws attention to the probability of liminality, invisibility and social irrelevance sustained during childhood. This was particularly true for women, whose lack of paid employment and therefore lack of disposable income - which is such a potent determinant of social relevance - meant they had grown old with less self-confidence, less authority and less money. For many, these characteristics were common to both childhood and old age.

Consequences of structural inequalities

One of the direct consequences of the structural inequalities discussed thus far is that the elderly individual sometimes experienced severe tension between competing definitions of who she was and who she thought she should be. Whilst valuing a sense of continuing identity, the elderly at Windsor Court were increasingly having to come to terms with identity change due to current experience and to different priorities. One solution was identification and conformity with the dominant ideology so that the marginal position of the elderly individual became a defining characteristic. A second possible solution, however, was the denial of conformity and the quest for the sustenance of an essentially fragile personal identity, in direct response to stereotypical and institutionalising specificities threatening it. In the last part of this chapter I offer some specific ethnographic examples to illustrate these two types of consequences.

The first example draws on a conversation between myself and the lunch club participants. This emerged from an attempt on my part to encourage the women to choose an activity for the afternoon. The point emerging is that the needs of the women, as marginalised persons, were largely ignored as irrelevant to the greater good of undertaking a group activity of which the care managers and I were a part.

The second example expands that of the first, with a revelation of the tensions that develop when the requirements of the elderly are given less value and priority because of their socially-ascribed marginality. There were two ways in which the Windsor Court

wardens retained their dominance. First, the residents' interests served those of the wardens, since the residents could only find a voice within the terms of reference structured in the interests of the dominant party: the wardens. The consequences of this were played out in inter-peer relations - effectively through a paralysis in collective decision-making. Second, the wardens retained their dominance through the amplification of differences between themselves and the residents - who might otherwise be a threat to their power. The consequences of this were to reinforce the marginal position of the residents.

Reinforcing marginality

Impotence in collective decision-making

Whilst Angus, the care manager, had been busy collecting lunch moneys; his attention was noticeably on other than providing participants with some form of entertainment. Helen had gone for a half hour break.

"I dinna ken whit they're a' daein'", complained Janet and she nodded knowingly: "Ye can manage mair than the three o' them". I shifted uncomfortably in my seat hoping that her remark had not been overheard. Janet was a deviant; she was *de trop*, continuously breaking rules and causing embarrassment.

"Annie". I turned desperately to Annie on my other side." What would you like to do this afternoon? How about bingo?"

Annie turned her weathered face towards me, her mouth wobbling in uncontrollable spasms. With extreme effort she mouthed, "Naw, Ah canna play Bingo - Ah dinna like it."

"What about a quiz?"

"Och Ah dinnae mind". Her blue eyes looked worried and she confirmed: "Ah dinna mind.". My carefully judged attempts to bring Annie in as decision-maker were falling apart.

"You don't mind?" I repeated questioningly, unsure if that was what she had said.

Anna's spasms in her jaw and mouth were sometimes so violent that the bright ear-rings in her ear lobes shook with force. The animation irresistibly fascinated. Sometimes, when there was music during the afternoon I could see that she was

mouthing the words to the songs being played. As I approached her voice would be audible - a throaty sound, but no articulation.

"What about Kathy?" I continued to try and achieve some sort of democratic response to my earlier question.

"Bingo. Let's play Bingo," Kathy chanted at me.

"Kathy's our Bingo fan", I said. "Who'd like to play bingo?" There were a few "naw's" and non-committal looks in my direction and some of the women returned to their blethering[2].

"Evelyn?" I looked in her direction but she was deep in conversation.

With characteristic outspokenness Janet said simply that she wasn't interested in bingo but that she could tolerate a quiz.

The women had participated in many quizzes before. Their failing eyesight made it difficult to take part in games which required them to use their eyes; stiff arms, wrists and hands and backs made it difficult to lean over their small tables and apply themselves to moving counters onto cards for the game. With concern, understanding that a decision had to be made, I announced: "Well, it sounds as though the balance is in favour of a quiz". Angus rushed off to the cupboard to dig something out.

I recognised, through all this indecision, that, together with the care manager, I was helping to denigrate the women's ability to suggest their own priorities and thus to empower themselves. There existed this tacit assumption that passivity and low intellectual games were 'the lot' of the women. We assumed that the women, like children, sought mental stimulation (indeed, one or two did!). We concocted a situation whereby it appeared that the women were being given a choice; in reality the choice was ours, not theirs. This provoked not empowerment but antagonism.

'The day oot'

The experience of the amplification of differences between carers and 'cared for' was perpetuated by the attitudes of the resident wardens at Windsor Court who maintained

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2 chatting

a consistent 'them and us' perspective. Specific events, such as 'The day oot' - the annual summer drive - were decided by the wardens with very little referral to residents themselves. This despite the long period of anticipation that heralded it. For many of the women, suspended in the net of trivia and futility of their last years at Windsor Court, these events were rare spasms of activity contained in a long inertia.

In August the day trip to Ayr was well attended by residents. But the coach drive was long and tedious, the countryside around Glasgow uninteresting and the highlight of the trip a walk round a shopping centre and a meal at a hotel, which, commented one resident, could have been achieved much closer to home. It was not a catalogue of complaints without foundation. A coach trip outside Fife was rare; many residents suffered medical conditions which caused acute discomfort if they were forced to sit in one position for too long or were not able to eat and drink at frequent intervals. The trip seemed to have been arranged around what the wardens wanted to do rather than result from a general consensus on what the residents might like to do.

The women confided that they would have liked to have had more say in where they went and what they did but, despite the fact that some were bitterly disappointed, they 'didnae want tae complain'. It was not long, however, before I managed to persuade some of the women to be more candid about their day.

"The warden wis way ahead wi her freen - intae a' the shops," complained Mrs Bishop.

"We were dropped at the shops. The streets were thrang wi shoppers an' Ah wis bitterly disappointed...

"Up near Carrbridge, it's like Switzerland", explained Mrs Muir, gesturing with her hands." But Glasgow, it's jest fields - flat, nae very interesting.

"Ye can gae tae a shoppin' centre anywhere, Ah longed tae gae tae some water - a river or loch - but we jest went tae the shops an' had oor meal."

The long return journey had been particularly exhausting. "It wis the furst time Ah'd felt ninety", commented Mrs Bishop.

"We collected fifteen poond an' sixty-three pence fur the raffle an' twenty poond an' sixty-eight pence fur the driver." Mrs Muir said with precision.

"Aye, but the driver ne'er spoke a word a' day," spat Mrs Bishop.

"Ah wid hae liked tae hae a bit o' information aboot the place ye're drivin' through" agreed Mrs Muir. "But jest silence! Still Ah mustna complain." she cautioned, anxiously straightening her position. "Ah'll say nocht aboot it. It wis nice tae gae oot."

It was possible that the Warden may hear of any complaint, publicise it and, much worse, victimise the plaintiff so that she or he unwittingly emerged in the new role of complainant; a role noted in Chapter 4 as one best avoided.

The consequence of threats to selfhood

Negative self-definitions and the need for retribution

Underpinning the almost suffocating need for order in their social lives, there existed a code of conduct complex enough to baffle outsiders such as myself yet tacitly understood by the residents of Windsor Court from the time they first set step in its corridors. One of its first principles was tolerance. Living in a context where circumstances magnified the ordinary trials of life into an assault course for living, people learned to accept the inevitable hazards on the way. Behind the most trivial of occurrences lay a stress point upon which material or emotional poverty or a crushing sense of inferiority had played for years. Consequently, frustrations had a tendency to burst out from time to time.

The women were sympathetic towards depression and moods, but chronic symptoms were harder to tolerate. Mairi was renowned for her black moods and her frequent churlishness. Fate had endowed her with a kind of malignancy, a small hard growth of bitterness which would frequently be activated by an accumulation of irritations. The result was anger against whatever was nearest to her at the time. To some extent, the other residents humoured her, as though they tolerated, quite unquestioningly, her right to be quarrelsome or difficult. Her presence within the group, following 'one of her moods' was always accepted; but there were no apologies, no forgiveness and ultimately no change in her circumstances.

Mairi would often be seated beside Margaret, whose phlegmatic approach to life eased her ability to negotiate terms with other residents. Margaret had contributed her own perspectives on Mairi's unhappiness. She responded with tolerance. "Mairi", she said firmly, "is only happy when she's daein' things fur ithers. She loves tae be asked tae dae things." But Margaret, as the next conversation shows, was not adverse to revealing her ambivalence about Mairi's behaviour.

One morning, not having seen Mairi for some time, I asked Margaret if she had seen anything of her.

"She's in the doldrums jest noo an' nae comin' doon tae coffee," replied Margaret. "She gaes through these bad patches - ken - nae wantin' tae see ither fowks."

"Oh that's a shame," I demurred.

"It's not a shame!" retorted Margaret indignantly. "She's bein' a carnaptious auld deil![3] She come doon tae the club yesterday but somebdy else wis sittin' in her chair."

There was a low convector radiator along the wall and Margaret gestured towards this. "She sat on the radiator fur a little, then somebdy got her a chair. But she didnae sit there fur twa seconds. She were near greetin[4]...an' she took aff an' went back tae her room." Margaret sighed and shook her head Then, contradicting her counsel above, she said, "She's jest camstairy[5]. She only thinks o' hersel an' talks aboot hersel. Ah get landed wi sittin' beside her." Then, with reference to her size, "Ah cannae get oot o' the way." She smiled ruefully.

Others had overheard this. As if, in her absence, to try and salvage Mairi's dignity, Mrs McAlea, a recently arrived resident, said softly: "Och she's a braw[6] lass, Mairi."

"Aye," said Mrs Miller, without a hint of sarcasm. "Ah had a great crack wi Mairi the other day."

Janet, a Lunch Club participant, later confided: "Flo, ma freen, she cannae look a' Mairi wi the steel plate an' twisted face[7]. She jest canna bear it." But, with an effort to reveal accommodative behaviour, she whispered. "Still, wi hae tae mind, ye ken, ma dear? There but fur the grace o' God."

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3 bad-tempered old devil!

4 crying

5 quarrelsome and stubborn

6 fine

7 Mairi's face was disfigured as a result of an operation poorly carried out during her teenage years

Mairi's behaviour indicated her need to get someone else to recognise the invalidation and injustice of her position. As her performance above shows and, as Chapter 4 related, she often excluded and denigrated others in the process. Whilst her strategy seemed to detract from rather than enhance the possibility of humanising her self, it clearly identified the turmoil within as she struggled with her own thoughts and feelings that had been socialised into acceptance of a negative self-definition. Recognition of her plight provoked anger within her and the need for retribution. Mairi had internalised the various forms of oppression she felt bound by to become, what Freire (1970, 1972) refers to, as the oppressor within.

Interpretations of the rights to one's self

If they tried to deny, as Mairi did, identification with the dominant ideology, it was at a cost to themselves. Sometimes it was easier to adopt their socially-ascribed marginality. Yet as the running of the Monday Lunch Club revealed, in Chapter 4, this tended to be self-reinforcing. However, such was the perception among some of its participants that inclusion in the Lunch Club was an acceptance of social worthlessness that they, like Mairi, sought means of exiting that ascribed identity - desperately clinging to an earlier identity and earlier priorities by justifying to themselves and others the unacceptability of their membership within the group.

In the final part of this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate this sort of self-imposed rejection by drawing on ethnographic material collected towards the close of my fieldwork period. The material relates to an episode that took place during the Monday Lunch Club. It demonstrates the way in which elderly individuals, in rehearsing their rights to their selves (and their rights to be their selves) may reconstruct the terms of their membership of the group. It also demonstrates the effect of the lack of social integration on consensual decision making within the group. The consequence here was the elevation of what might otherwise have been viewed as something of ordinary nature into a crisis, followed by the disruption of solidarity within the club.

Self-assertion and the collapse of solidarity

The episode began one Monday after lunch, with Angus drawing the attention of the women to an issue that they all needed to discuss.

"Ah've had a talk wi David, the Social Work Manager," Angus said, trying to sound casual, "an' Ah hae a few remarks aboot hoo we fund the lunches an' the tea an' coffee.

"Ah ken that yin or twa o' ye dinna eat lunch but ye still hae tea an' coffee. Therefore we would like tae suggest that a small payment is made fur the tea an' coffee. Those who pay yin poond fifty get lunch an' tea an' coffee an' biscuits fur that. Fae noo on those who dinna eat lunch but drink tea an' coffee, we wid like ye tae mak a payment o' thirty pence t'wards this. Sometimes we hae twa or three cups durin' the day, so we think this is quite reasonable."

There was silence, then Janet made an abrupt announcement shattering the line of thought:

"Weel, this'll be ma last time here."

"Whit dae ye mean?" Angus asked.

"Weel, Ah've paid in advance up to noo, but Ah canna eat the lunch an' the tea disnae agree wi me, so Ah shouldna be comin'". It was not a fact but an emotion which passed like an electric current through the gathering.

"Och Janet!" Ruby exclaimed. "O' course ye maun come."

"But ye're alone a' day. Whit will ye dae? Ye should get oot - it's guid fur ye," protested Margaret.

"Na. Dinna try tae stop me. Ah've made up ma mind," Janet replied firmly.

"Weel, Ah'm sorry," said Angus without reassurance.

"Dinna be. Ah' d a'ready decided that Ah wid stop comin'."

Angus frowned. "Can ye explain exactly whit it is ye dinnae like?" he asked, concerned. "Hae Ah got BO or somethin'?" He tried to ease the tension.

"It's nae that." Janet replied gravely. "Ah've thocht aboot it some time. Ah paid fur ma lunches. Ah dinna like the lunches an' Ah canna eat them an' Ah canna drink the tea so Ah dinna want tae pay money. Ah'd jest rather stop comin'," replied Janet with an air of finality.

"Weel," Angus sighed, "there're twenty-one people on the waiting list who'd like tae come tae the club," said Angus. "Some o' them hae bin waitin' fur mair than twa year."

"Weel then!" pronounced Janet triumphantly." They can hae ma place!"

And that was about the end of the discussion. Angus did not try to persuade Janet any further other than saying that he would keep her place open for a month in case she changed her mind.

Janet smiled. "Ah willna change ma mind. Ah'm nae comin' back. So why dae ye nae let them come next week?" But on this one point Angus refused to budge and the topic appeared to be closed.

Later on during the afternoon Agnes whispered anxiously to me."This'll stop Flo comin' tae. She canna eat the lunch neither an' she willna want tae pay fur it if she's nae eatin' it." Flo was holidaying with her family in Cornwall.

"But she won't have to pay for it, Agnes," I replied. "She'll only have to pay for tea or coffee."

"Flo willna want tae come back," Agnes shook her head.

I rang Flo early on the Monday morning of the following week. She had just returned from holiday the previous day and her holiday memories were still uppermost in her mind. She launched into cheerful conversation.

"Flo," I eventually asked. "Are you coming to the Lunch Club today?"

Flo hesitated and then asked suspiciously. "Why? Hae ye heard ony reason why Ah shouldna?"

I admitted that there had been an argument the previous week over payments for tea and coffee and that Janet had decided to leave the group.

Flo was already well-versed in what had happened the previous week and my own candour meant that she was in a secure position to respond.

"Ah'm nae gaun back," she said decisively. "Ah've written a note tae say thank ye an' tae gie ma reasons - an' tae say tae Rab Ah'm askin' fur him. Ah'll gie it tae the driver when he comes tae pick me up." Flo registered my silence. "Weel - ye ken. Ah've telt ye, haven't Ah? Aboot ma stomach an' ma problems an' why Ah dinna eat the lunch?

"Ah didna want tae make a scene like Janet an' Ah've got nae reason tae. Ah jest want tae say whit Ah hae tae say in a note. There's a lang waitin' list an' Ah really feel that the class isna whit Ah want anymair. It's nae the same. Ah dinna really object tae payin'

fur the cups o' tea but it's nae that. Ah jest dinnae enjoy the class any mair. When Ah come alang it's nae the same any mair." She paused. "A' yon poor auld souls sittin' there an' nae daein' ocht. We jest sit an' talk. When Ah had ma knittin' it was a'richt but noo ma hauns are giein me problems tae. Ah used tae feel that we did sumpin' but noo it jest makes me depressed. Ah dinna really want tae gae back. Ah'm also gettin' medication fur anaemia an' Ah canna really stomach the food.

"An' Ah'll tell ye sumpin' else! Last time it wis fish supper. An' it wis that Helen servin' up an' she fingered everything! Ah canna cope wi that. It jest turns ma stomach!"

It was not just that some of the women felt unable to eat the food served up it was also that some would not eat the food because they were concerned about the cleanliness of its preparation. I assured Flo that I sympathised with her sentiments. I arranged to come and take her and Margaret out for tea the following Thursday.

I duly met Flo at her home on the Thursday following. Margaret had rung me in the morning to say that she had a sore toe and did not feel well enough to venture out. Flo decided that we should stay put and arrange another time when both women were able to come. She produced tea and digestive biscuits. Her room was simply furnished; easily managed. A small single bed; her photographs of her family on every available surface. She sat talking, buoyant and excited.

After a while the conversation drifted onto the lunch club and Janet's decision to leave. Flo explained that not many in the class liked her. “She us'd tae bring a cake or biscuits, each week. She ayeways brocht somethin' but the ithers didna like that. It made them feel guilty that they hadna brocht somethin'. It showed them up.”

One of the ways in which the women evaluated each other was through doing favours, good deeds or gift giving. By giving, self-esteem could be enhanced; by receiving, it could, conversely, diminish. This inevitably created a resistance to being on the receiving end. It was, in fact, remarkably difficult to give and to satisfy the two conditions of, first, making the giving a public act so that the donor would receive esteem; and, second, ensuring at the same time that, in the act of giving, one did not shame others and so lose the esteem gained.

After a long and repetitive discussion with Flo about the lunch club and her desire to leave, she flourished a piece of paper in front of me. “Here's the letter Ah've wrote tae Angus, tellin' him ma reasons why. Ye can read it. Ah've nae sent it yet.”

'Dear Angus,

Just a few lines to let you know that I won't be returning to the Day Class. I no longer feel the need for stimulation of that sort and since there's a long waiting list of people wanting to come, it's much better that they take my place. Thank you for putting up with me and I hope that the Class continues to go well for you.

Best wishes to Rab in his new home.

Flo.'

This was Flo's swan song. Neither she nor Janet returned to the club again.

Concluding comments

The task of resolving the dualism of the preservation of personal continuity and coping with change was radically affected by structural inequalities. These both perpetuated and built on the problems of identity discussed in Chapter 4, and meant that the elderly in question lived in the shadow of a dominant or prevailing ideology which marginalised and invalidated both personal and collective meaning.

At both Windsor Court and the Lunch Club the terms of reference of social reality were structured in the interests of the dominant group. Like the wardens, the other care managers, completely unconsciously and unwittingly, it often seemed, elevated their own importance and power at the cost of the women's needs to be givers and to receive public honour by way of role-acting or their ability to be generous. The women were almost always pushed into the role of 'receiver' and, in that position, their self-worth - their honour - was correspondingly diminished. That the group was 'run' at all as a 'class' was an error. Inevitably, the social workers dominated the stage and used up more than their share of opportunities to be visible.

Three other points helped to reinforce and amplify differences between resident elders and care managers. There was the social distance maintained between the 'cared for' and the carers. In the context of the latent but very real fear of the threat of loss of control, there was, secondly, the non-verbalised requirement for social control manifested in a code of conduct among the elderly individuals. Underlying all this there was, thirdly, the influence of socio-cultural conditioning.

The consequences of this were immense but led to the elders identifying either with each other in a conformist sense, imbibing marginal characteristics, or else acting in a non-conformist and retributive manner. The former revealed itself in terms of impotence in

collective decision making and the denial by authoritative parties, such as the wardens, of the value of the residents' contributions to collective decision-making. The latter revealed itself in terms of negative self-definition and retribution. To be 'in' the group one had to learn the rules of conduct. Whilst deviance and other ways of breaking the rules had the effect of denying commonality it also had the unfortunate effect of exclusion from solidarity.

For the Lunch Club participants the significance of these issues were augmented by the fact that underneath the conduct of the prevailing interest groups lay contradictory understandings of the gathering and its purposes. These same contradictory issues afflicted other meetings too (for example, those of Dunfermline Elderly Forum), whenever there was reference to an external authoritative party which might influence the outcome of any decisions taken.

The sort of structural problems that led to marginalisation among the Windsor Court and Lunch Club residents are contrasted with the situation at Phillip House, described in Chapter 9, in which the introduction of more subjective and personal modes of operating influenced relational developments among those growing old within the culture of care there. In sharp contrast to the impersonality of decision making at the Lunch Club, decision making here was a democratic, personal exercise reiterating the residents' collective but fragile worth, through the assured and gentle determination of the warden. In this context the task of both residents and warden was to find a way of reaching a new identity: that separating the symbolic from the real. The next two chapters, in exploring in more depth the degree of social integration and the type of care made available at Windsor Court and Phillip House, respectively, examine how far living contexts there enhanced or detracted from this possibility.

Chapter 8

The means through which people construct the terms of their social membership at Windsor Court

Introduction

The move into Windsor Court and Phillip House was, for the elderly, a rite of passage as significant as the consequential transformation of relationships that followed. Transition demanded initiation into a new kind of social membership. Studies of initiation into such new kinds of social membership suggest that induction has the capacity to remake the self - creating a new form of more relevance to the group - what Cohen terms 'socially scripted personhood' (1994:80). In this chapter I explore the form of this socially scripted personhood at Windsor Court. Central themes comprise the ideas and practices of friendship, of social interaction, and of authority and self-control.

At both Windsor Court and Phillip House life had a regularity about it which defined social order and which, I argued in Chapter 7, was intractably linked with the institutional environment. At Windsor Court the number of opportunities for residents to have contact with each other was dependent on individual rather than on communal enterprise. In particular the following ethnography rehearses the problems, described previously, which are created when actors perceive their inability to influence interaction and co-operation of the collective and, hence, the development of a sense of solidarity.

Public and private space

Willcocks *et al.* (1987) have pointed out that one of the paradoxes of residential care settings is that the elderly are expected to live their private lives in a public space. Whilst acknowledging that the sheltered home was not in the same category as the 'residential home', it was subject to similar paradoxes. It became private in so much as each resident would spend the majority of the rest of his or her life there, and therefore privacy and a degree of self-autonomy was required; it became a public space in so much as it was staffed, and life there was defined by a working environment which society had put in place to help the individuals living there to manage their lives. The sheltered home inhabited both public and private domains

simultaneously. To a large extent the means by which social membership was constructed, and the integrity of the self maintained, reflected the regulation of these different spheres.

The construction of sociable relations at Windsor Court

Intimacy without warmth

The common room at Windsor Court was the only public arena in the building. It was used one morning each week for a house gathering over coffee, one evening each week for whist and one afternoon per month for a religious service. For much of the rest of the time it lay empty.

Residents cooked and ate their own meals in their own flats and watched their own television and listened to their own music there - all opportunities highly valued. They met in the washing room or when washing clothes; they were, however, more likely to bump into one of their neighbours when walking in town than in the silence of the passage ways dividing the flats at Windsor Court. The only communal events for residents were organised by the warden and included irregular events such as slide shows, lectures and concerts.

Expectations of Windsor Court differed among new occupants. Some expressed their surprise that their new neighbours failed to make informal use of the common room. Mrs Hutchinson, the wife of a former miner, had lived at Windsor Court for four years. Now in her ninety-fourth year, she confessed: "When Ah furst come here, Ah thocht they'd be doon here sittin' daein their knittin' an' haein a crack[1]," she said, "but they dinna want tae seem tae dae that," she ended with a puzzled frown.

Her wistful response revealed differences between what outsiders perceived may be available to them at Windsor Court and the reality. The reality for many was this. The residents were bound by familiarity of difficulties, circumstance and problems, projecting a kind of intimacy without warmth. Entrance to Windsor Court provided the new resident with a formal, automatically extended relationship rather as if she or he were taking a place on a team; there was no guarantee that the relationship would be either organic or developing. In this respect, for some who had previously lived

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[1] Fifers reference to a good "crack" or "blether" was a reference to a wide range of conversation which could include gossip, jokes..."pub talk".

isolated lives, it more closely mirrored the cultural environment from which they had relocated. For others, like Mrs Hutchinson, who had moved from a rural community where sociable relations incorporated daily interaction and exchange with neighbours and other locals, the lack of informal interaction with ones peers was outside her experience. At Windsor Court she sought the continuation of a 'community of the past' - in a sense, a mythological community (see Anderson, 1983) - which embodied a common bond of fellowship influenced by the shared expectations, norms and beliefs which emerged from a sharing of past and present experiences and celebrated and reconstituted though conversation, through curiosity and through care for one's fellow human beings. This development, as I will argue, faced considerable obstacles. That the residents failed to abstract their basic common denominators: 'we auld fowk', 'we fowk who lived through the Wars', 'we Fifers' and to use these as a way of providing a basis for the new 'we residents', pointed to the strength of other opposing tendencies.

What, then, were these opposing tendencies? After all, it was not as though the residents were oblivious to the basic assumptions they shared about the world, such as shortage of material possessions when they were children, shortage of food during the War, their role in marriage as wife and as carer of children, the division of religious activities into Catholic or Protestant. Neither were they oblivious to the needs of each other. In the public domain these needs were sometimes seen to over-ride all else. Recognition of these particular shared experiences would have inevitably been overshadowed by the more pressing personal identities such as physical aches and pains resulting from the common problems of rheumatism and arthritis. The women knew that pain could absorb one's whole being, stifling any ability to reach beyond this.

Other significant items on the personal agenda would also command attention. Concern, for example, about whether to take on a part-time voluntary job; or the difficulties of relationships with their families stimulated commiseration, led to offers of advice or, at the very least, provided a feeling of being understood and not suffering alone. These alone, however, were insufficient to allow the development of that 'community of the past'. The answer to this lay elsewhere. It was that the house culture failed to point the women towards their individual links with their unique values, fostered by a unique history. In this failure it appeared that it was therefore unable to provide the cornerstone of each resident's unique development - the recognition of a continuous personal identity centred upon past experiences.

Opportunities for getting to know each other

Friendships and conflicts were made visible only during communal gatherings. The fact that these were limited in number probably had the effect of reducing conflict but also reduced opportunities for friendship. At many of the communal meetings the male residents failed to attend at all. To the uninitiated the coffee morning, the principal social gathering, appeared to be a female preserve.

During the year a new couple, the Forsyths, moved into Windsor Court and, right from the start, both husband and wife regularly attended the coffee morning. The other women approved of the presence of Mr Forsyth. When he was ill and unable to attend for two weeks, the residents offered their sympathy to his wife: "Tell yer man we're askin' fur him an' tell him tae get weel soon, because we like him here."

"Och, he enjoys comin'," his wife assured them. "He didnae like it at furst because it's a' ladies," she said candidly, "but he's got used tae that."

The degree of distance between individual residents and the length of time it took to establish relationships was made clear when these newcomers invited Mrs Hutchinson to visit them at home.

"We're at Number Echt," said Mrs Forsyth.

"Number Echt.." pondered Mrs Hutchinson. "Noo, where's that?"

Mrs Forsyth described where it was and Mrs Hutchinson turned to me with an embarrassed laugh. "Ah bin here fower year an' Ah dinna ken ma way roon. Ah ne'er gae anyplace else - Ah jest sit in ma ain hame."

Such a statement was supported by others. "We're nae neeborly," said Mrs Miller. "Ah see Mrs Beverley across the way (across the corridor) but Ah could sit here a' day an' nae see a soul. Mind ye, in a way, that's the best. Ye dinna want tae be busy knockin' on each ither's doors a' the time. Ye jest see each other at events."

"Aye. Och aye", confirmed Mrs Beverley. "Yer hame is yer ain. Ye shut yer door. Whoever rings ye can either ask them in or nae - jest as ye like."

"Do you meet your neighbours very often when you are going out?" I asked.

"Ye dinna get oot. Ye dinna meet yer neebors very much at a'. O' course, they go tae Church on Sunday - maist o' them. Some o' them jest gae roon the corner tae this Church roon here." Mrs Beverley gestured towards the outside. "But Ah've ayeways gaun tae ma husband's church which is in the toun. So, ma neebor in Cameron Street - she has a car an' she takes me to Church. Ah dinna hae a lot o' visitors noo. A' ma freens're deid an' gone."

When the residents were actually given the opportunity to reflect on their situation, most of them considered themselves fortunate. Mrs Hutchinson, when asked whether she was content living at Windsor Court, replied: "Well, Ah've bin here three year a'ready - Ah'll be ninety-fower in November - an' Ah think Ah've done very weel. It's a lovely wee place. So convenient."

"There's a very nice crowd in here", said Mrs Bishop. "Mair or less elderly people, o' course, because Ah think ye hae tae hae a disadvantage o' some kind tae be allowed in here. Ye hae tae hae a Doctor's certificate."

At this point in my field-work it was difficult to judge how far reports of satisfaction with the *status quo* reflected the candid thoughts of the older people. I was aware of previous studies showing elderly people to be singularly uncritical of the care they receive (Biggs, 1993:155; Chiriboga, 1990). Whilst Wilkin and Hughes (1987) suggest this works to maintain established routines and attitudes among staff, Biggs (1993:15) notes how difficult it is for outsiders to penetrate the culture of compliance and non-deviance. Certainly, older people responding to my queries above seemed cheerfully resolute about citing satisfaction with their living environment.

Seating configurations at the coffee morning

Overall, the coffee morning provided limited opportunities for mixing and talking with new or different residents. Residents always addressed each other by surname even though, as soon as they exited the room some, at least, referred to their friends using first names.

Seating configurations were highly stylised. The arrangement of the chairs, in the shape of a horseshoe, constrained the conversation to those sitting immediately to the left or right. Although there was no formal seating arrangement - over who should sit where - there was a tendency to occupy the same positions each week, so that the same people always sat together to blether with the same individuals. Small groups formed

round different topics of conversation by a kind of spontaneous but already familiar cohesion. These arrangements dramatically impressed upon some of the women that they were social exiles, trying to fix themselves securely in corners of the new social milieu of Windsor Court.

The seating pattern did not obviously make some seats less desirable than others. Most of the women wanted to be able to see, with as much ease as possible, all the other women, and the circle of chairs gave them this option. There were no other reasons, other than force of habit and known established friendships, to decide a choice of seat. Simone de Beauvoir (1970:521) has pointed out that habit can provide a degree of ontological security; it removes the individual from the old enemy, time, and provides them with that eternity which they perhaps cannot easily find in the present moment.

Pairs and groups of friends could be identified at a glance by seating arrangements. A cluster of central personalities, with the strongest friendship ties, sat within the curving 'toe' of the horseshoe. Friendship pairs and 'loners' occupied the peripheries.

Seating configurations were important in the development of friendships among residents, because, among other things, they determined who sat beside whom. Friends, according to Allan (1979:40) are 'selected' and 'chosen'; achieved rather than ascribed. He makes the important point that 'where there is a personal relationship with another based on criteria other than free choice, or when a person's choice is consequential to a greater or lesser extent on factors for which she perceives she is not responsible, then the relationship is unlikely to be considered one of friendship'. This was significant for the women who attended group gatherings at Windsor Court, since, for so much of the time, they were situated in a position where they could, only with difficulty, choose with whom they mixed and sat.

It was acknowledged by some of the residents that a 'personal chair', or the adoption of a territorial attitude towards the seating arrangement might be regarded as odd by outsiders. Many of the chairs were, however, stained, through incontinence and some of the women refused to sit in them.

"Ye were sittin' in ma chair!" Mrs Muir said to me jocularly, as she returned to her seat which she had previously vacated in order to go and speak with someone on the other side of the circle of chairs. I apologised, clutching at Goldilocks' response with equal tongue in cheek humour.

"Och naw, that's a'richt," she reassured me. "Ah can sit anywhere".

Mrs Hutchinson, who had been listening to our interchange and was well aware of the sensitivity over seating patterns, commented: "Ah sit whaurever - it disna matter tae me".

Despite the apparent fluidity of seating arrangements at Windsor Court, there was a hidden agenda with which most newcomers were soon made aware. A more satisfying 'crack' was likely to emerge through familiarity, trust and predictability. This was observed by Jerrome (1992:88) who found that people who successfully retain their seats are more likely to establish intimate relationships which themselves were important in the management of old age.

Close friends sat in such a way that allowed the maximum amount of conversation, yet at the same time, secured a position that allowed them to remain out of earshot of other people. The degree of poor hearing among a number of residents greatly assisted. There was a curious blend of exclusivity and inclusivity. If it was felt that one's neighbour, who one was seated beside, was being excluded from a conversation then an apology was obligatory. "Och, Ah'm sorry Mrs Beverley. Ah dinna mean tae be ignorant by nae talkin' tae ye." I felt that this happened more often in my presence and when a conversation between myself and a resident excluded others. It was as though residents did not wish others to see themselves as objects of favouritism. Much of this was a thin veneer, however, and I could not help but be reminded of Goffman's warning. 'Persons who treat each other with consideration in each other's immediate presence will regularly show not the slightest consideration for each other in situations where acts of deprivation cannot be immediately and incontestably identified as to source by the person who is deprived by these acts' (1961:52).

Limits to friendship formation

In the communal settings at Windsor Court and, as we shall see in the next chapter, at Phillip House, friendships did not automatically exist as a result of people being members of group gatherings. The personal relationship of friendship involves individuals as individuals, not as members of groups. There is nothing to stop a group of people being friends with each other and sometimes this was the case, but group gatherings shed more illumination on who were not friends, rather than who were.

One of the constraints to friendship development at some of the group gatherings, such as the Tuesday coffee morning, was their formality. Friendship scores low on what McCall (1970) terms 'formality'. It is seen as independent of a person's formal role position; it certainly does not develop simply because of the role positions filled. The coffee mornings were arenas for role enactment, rather than friendship development. Residents often seemed to interact with each other as if each considered the other part of an exchangeable set. But a friend is valued as a unique person and cannot be replaced, as can say, another coffee-morning participant who might be seen to be as distant as the doctor or home help.

Of course, friendships often develop as a consequence of people occupying formal role positions (Suttles, 1970:97), for example, in work situations. Outside the work situation, however, roles are jostled for, rather than ascribed, and it remains unlikely that friendships will develop on the consequence of interactions in respective role positions.

A friendship is also a personal relationship in the sense of it being a private one. It is therefore of concern only to those who are friends. Within such criteria, public propriety is secondary to what is involved in a particular friendship (Suttles, 1970). Whether a venue for older people encapsulated an activity-centred basis (such as bingo) or a more formal event (such as coffee), the fact that the group activities required a degree of public propriety would automatically ensure difficulties in 'real friendship' development. As noted above, the ambivalence of the sheltered home as both public and private space created difficulties for an organic development of friendship, since the public sphere commanded the sort of behaviour which tended to allow little opportunity for self-expression. As Suttles (1970) discusses at length, an important way in which people become friends, and 'everyday real' friends, is by breaking the normal 'rules of public propriety'. This serves to reveal the 'real self' and, for the friends, symbolises the strength of their friendship bond (Allan, 1979:40).

Lack of ritual, symbolic or public performance attached to friendship creation or loss has been emphasised by Allan (1979). Despite a lack of societal conventions governing the way in which friendships form, there are certain established norms regarding gender, age and class. Although within the managed care setting, where age is less variable, Nussbaum (1991) argues that homogeneity and close proximity can overcome class, ethnicity and gender as predictors of friendship.

As far as my own sentiments went, even after one year I did not feel close enough to any of the women to regard them as 'close' friends. I am certain that this was mutual. I am equally certain that my age and class, as well as the fact that the women were to some extent under my scrutiny and knew that they were, increased our distance. Yet, I was referred to as a friend. When I returned, with card and gift, early in 1995, to say good-bye to the Windsor Court women the warden asked me to make a speech. I recoiled, not particularly wishing to enter the spotlight.

"Why are ye worried?" she asked with surprise. "They're a' yer freens." Yet from both my point of view and the point of view of the women whom I was asked to address, we were not 'real' friends. To get to know someone as a friend involves getting to know the 'real person' (Allan, 1979:39). To like them is to like this 'real person' (Kurth, 1970; Naegale, 1958; Suttles, 1970). 'Real' friends are those with whom one can be oneself. There need be no masks; no fronts; one can be honest; genuine; natural; and banish masquerade and pretence. Friends are those whom one admits to what Goffman (1971) terms the 'back-stage' or 'back region' of one's behaviour: those parts of oneself that would make one vulnerable among those whom one can not trust - hence the importance of friendship when so much of the older person's energy is devoted to releasing the tension between one's own individuality and the image enforced by society (chapter 4). As Allan (1979:39) suggests, whether or not this is actually possible does not matter. What is important is the cultural belief that this is how things should be, between friends.

Those who are allowed to get to know the other's 'real self' will place them in the position of being more likely to understand that 'real self' and enhance the probability of close friendship. To claim that some friends are allowed to discover the 'real self' more than others is to say that some are trusted more than others. This is the major difference between those people considered as 'real' or 'best' friends and the remainder. Most women at Windsor Court situated their friends within the latter category. Mrs Hutchinson told me: "Ye dinnae mak real freens here. Ye dinnae try tae...ye can hear them - the backbitin'. It's better tae keep a bit distant, sae people dinnae ken ye tae weel."

There appeared to be few women who could claim with assurance that total trust evoked by 'real' friendship and who had found friends who could be relied upon to protect their interest; who would not gossip or use revelations of the self meant for their ears alone.

The consequences of the limits to friendship

There were three consequences of the limits to friendship. First of all, friends who were not labelled 'real' friends were likely to be treated cautiously. Perhaps they were interesting and one might be sociable with them, but they were not those to whom one revealed innermost fears of worries. Secondly, as friendship was of concern only to those who were friends there was no need for public demonstration of its strength. Indeed, this would have been counter-productive, creating even further distance between these individuals and others who clearly were not counted among their friends. Thirdly, and most significantly, the concept of sharing and solidarity through adversity, a key factor identified by the women themselves as underpinning community life in the past was given few opportunities to flourish. This was not altogether surprising given the inhibitions and stereotyping that the institutional environment imposed on its members and members imposed on themselves. Moreover, within what is perceived as a public environment it is, of course, as pointed out by Biggs (1993:154) quite an effective strategy to protect one's self-integrity by keeping others at a distance, thereby protecting what little privacy is left. In this context boundaries were maintained on both sides: between carers and residents; and between residents, replacing common humanity with, in Biggs' words, 'homogenised and stereotyped perceptions of the other' (1993:154). Yet, even if some of the residents themselves revealed a predisposition to respond favourably to questions about satisfaction with their residence, it was impossible to avoid the conclusion that there was little scope for ways of passing on accrued experience or for developing a collective understanding of existentialism in older age.

Breakdown in the intimate community

The above passages, together with the discussions of the previous chapter, suggest that grave difficulties existed within the sheltered housing for those old who wanted 'to knock on each others' doors' on a regular basis as they did as children. The celebration of communal sociability represented by the open-door policy and central to the notion of community in the occupational community, did not operate here. In its place was a policy of enclosure - a fencing off from the public gaze.

On the other hand that same policy of enclosure threw residents into a sort of uneasy community immersion by the denial of privacy. It was hard for secrets to be kept; the flats and corridors were whispering grounds - the proximity of residences allowing ready collusion. But that intimate symbolic threshold - the front door - was a largely

meaningless and functionless threshold. It was now entrance to family and non-family, community and non-community alike, symbolising the breakdown in boundaries of community membership: a material symbol of the destruction of a cherished social order. In more ways than one. For the friends that at one time would have been won socially over the washing line or at the corner shop may well not have known what the inside of one's home was like. They may never have stepped across the threshold (Hoggart, 1958:35). The hearth was reserved for the family and 'real friends' - folk who were 'something to them', and looked in for a chat or just to sit. Much of the residents' former free time will usually have passed at that hearth. Just 'staying in', I was told, was one of the most common leisure time occupations. But in the sheltered home it was no longer so, for if one spends the entire hours of one's week 'staying in' how can that then accrue the label of leisure? Life at both complexes demanded a reassessment of the way one spent one's hours and, indeed, of who one was. Life no longer revolved around the home and hearth, with mother at the centre. The firm centre had gone. The significance of this fed through life in the sheltered home and elsewhere. For the more I spent time with the elderly in West Fife, and the more I tried to reach the core of their strongly working-class attitudes, the more surely did it appear that the core was a sense of the personal, the literal and the local.

Forty years ago Hoggart (1958:33) claimed that this core was embodied in the idea of, first, the family and, second, the neighbourhood. Perhaps the truth is that over the years this had persisted, not despite all that worked against it, but *because* so much worked against it. Perversely, it persisted in a disjointed fashion in the sheltered home. Here, the institutional emphasis was neighbourhood first and family second. But old ideas are not so easily dislodged and, against this inversion, as I begin to consider at the close of this chapter and develop in successive ones, there was a continual and opposing struggle for the revelation of all that had made these people as they were: mothers and wives first; neighbours and friends second.

Against this backcloth of the limits to friendship formation and the breakdown of the intimate community the ethnographic example of the coffee morning at Windsor Court that follows has been likened to a masquerade. The event unveils an arena prohibiting any moral or legal infringements of the norm which might distinguish outsiders (those not included within the friendship circle). In this sense, everyone is an insider but no one is to be seen pursuing a particular friendship to the exclusion of others.

A vignette - the Windsor Court coffee morning

It was a cold, wet July morning as I walked quickly towards Windsor Court for the coffee morning. As always I felt slight apprehension. Even after several months of attending, I never really felt at ease at this event. Perhaps it was due to the misunderstanding about my attendance. I felt sure that I was misunderstood; that I was expected to do more than I was doing. But I felt unable to offer myself in any other role. Whilst the wardens tended to impress on me the fact that I appeared to do very little to help, my attempts to dissuade them from this view, through offers to assist with the preparation of coffee or the handing out of cups and saucers, were met with a polite but firm refusal.

There was a small group of women seated near the window, Mrs Armour in the centre. Beside her, and contorted by arthritis into the frame of her wheelchair sat Mrs Jamieson, smoking. From the doorway the conversations were barely audible.

Certain women were centre pieces: for a variety of reasons, they managed to establish relationships more easily and with more women than others. They were bridge builders and diplomats. Mrs Stuart was just such an individual. She marched firmly past me into the room, her presence solid and reassuring.

"If ye see the nurse, let me know as Ah'm waitin' on her," she instructed those women with a view to the outside. She settled herself into a high-backed chair which she had dragged from the pool of chairs behind the circle and afforded her a greater chance of seeing incoming people to the building. There was quiet again.

I felt uncomfortable. The expectant silence seemed to beg for a 'crack' to break it; the formality of the setting seemed to draw in the greyness and drizzle from outside. Maureen, the relief warden, was busying herself with the coffee and tea in the far corner of the room; Betty, the principal warden, was on annual leave.

I attempted some conversation, lapsing into the story of my own week after failing to encourage my neighbour to indulge me with the story of her's. The women listened politely, only breaking their attention to smile and to offer a welcome to the next person entering the room.

The conversation ran dry again. Martha brushed nervously with her fingers at her static hairline, assuring herself that her morning's attention to detail was not lost. In

this stark and solemn quietness, the women sat, hands folded in front of them or anxiously twisting, in between sipping tea and nibbling at biscuits.

The abstraction of accrued experience through oral and local tradition

I filtered into a conversation that had started up two seats away.

"O' course, we cannae use the washin' machines in the morn - the hame helps are usin' them," I overheard Mrs Muir saying.

"Does everyone have a home-help?" I asked.

"Well, I dinna hae yin," said Mrs Johnstone. "Dae ye, hen?" she asked Joan Miller. Joan nodded.

"They dinna dae much, ye ken," considered Mary Johnstone, with a thoughtful reference to the home helps.. "They jest hoover yer carpet an' dicht roon".[2]

"Ah've a wee square on ma kitchen flair an' Ah canna reach it," said Mrs Stuart. "Ah cannae get doon on ma hauns an' knees."

"Ah jest use a mop but it's nae the same."

"Aye weel, it's jest as weel ye ne'er let yer gear gang ye. Mind, thae washin' machines are wonderful ..." Mrs Johnstone replied.

"Weel, Ah dae a' ma smalls by hand, ev'ry day, Ah dinna use the washin' machines," said Joan.

"Dae ye no'?" responded Mrs Muir incredulously. "Ah'd a fault wi ma twin tub, but ma son Jack - he's electrical ye ken - he fixed it in nae time."

"Aye, skill an' love gae best" responded Mrs Stuart.

The subject changed to that of window cleaners. "Two poond an hoor an' they clean inside an' oot - the hame help willna dae that," said Mrs Stuart.

"O' course ma son helps wi minor jobs an' his wife cleans the curtains an' aw that."

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[2] wipe around

What struck me most forcibly about these conversations was the degree to which the women still drew, in speech and in the assumptions to which speech is a guide, on oral and local tradition. For example, there was Mrs Johnstone, with the aphorism: ' ye ne'er let yer gear gang ye' - meaning 'you don't just take pride in material things'; also, Mrs Stuart's reference to 'skill an' love gae best', meaning 'when skill and love work together the result is best'. Hoggart's analysis (1958:28) of the persistence of these forms of speech, despite the universal standardising power of the media and mass communication, is helpful. He suggests not that old attitudes are unaffected, or that these older forms of speech retain their power and vibrancy but that they imply a tradition which, although weak, is hard to repress completely. He also suggests that the old lean upon them as a fixed reference (1958:29) and as a more trustworthy reference in a world increasingly complex and difficult to understand. The use of these aphorisms was a kind of comfort, one often contradicting another to prove opposing views. This did not matter to the women for, like myth and superstition, they were invoked when necessary - providing a subjective sort of reassurance. Inconsistencies did not trouble them; they could believe or not believe. They would repeatedly utter these phrases, and practise their sanctions and permissions, within an oral tradition still strong and slow to change.

Beneath the literal speech and the use of traditional figures of speech there was a symbolic element emerging within these conversations too. It was not just that house cleaning and domestic chores occupied a large part of their present lives; they were major constituents of their former lives too - a chain of continuity with these. Further than this, cleaning and domestic work could be viewed as a metaphysical cleaning and preparation of the body. The intimacy and accessibility of their homes and their bodies made them special. Bodies and houses became homologous symbols of each other.

Old age requires good body- and house-keeping and this is something at which the women in particular had become experts over their lives. They 'managed' their bodies in the same way they used to manage their children and their husband's weekly pay packet. They recognised the singular importance of taking good care of themselves - a hard conceptual adjustment for people who had spent so much of their lives taking care of others. They did not expect a great deal out of life and had never had things easily. It was therefore not a great shock for them to once again find themselves, as they grew older, in difficult circumstances. They were reconciled to life being a struggle, replete with dualisms: joy and sorrow; kindness and cruelty being closely entwined. They

never expected 'tae get somethin' fur nothin". Their relatively poor upbringings had moulded them into passionate claimants of pride and autonomy, creating of them givers, rather than takers. Whilst their own personal needs increasingly took precedence, there remained admiration for those who were able still to devote effort towards supporting others more needy than they. Within a body of people such as those at Windsor Court, it was always possible to view another as more needy than oneself.

I mentioned to the women that, on more than one occasion, my newly acquired neighbours had taken in my laundry off the line when it had been raining, dried it in their tumble drier and left a message on my answering machine to say where it was. A veritable mix of the use of old and new traditions. Indeed I had been astonished at their generosity. On my other side my neighbour, Jessica, would give me a tithe of her garden produce - potatoes, onions, leeks, cabbage, apples. In September the poles of the washing lines in the back gardens, as far as the eye could see, were draped with unimaginable quantities of onions.

"Weel, we're guid sorts up here, ye ken," said Mrs Stuart, quite seriously.

Forms of self presentation

As if to prove the point Joan Miller announced ceremoniously that it was time for her to get the messages[3]. This performance took place every Tuesday morning. Armed with a long list she went off to the local baker to purchase residents' requirements. The list was always scribbled on the back of an envelope: the orders and the name of the person who made the order beside this. Quite why this did not happen at other times during the week was never made clear. Perhaps this was a publicly practical way in which Joan could make herself useful. Irene, who was square in shape, was the subject of some affectionate jibes for her ordering of two vanilla slices and a pie. She took it all in good heart, her large frame silhouetted against the smaller and frailer of the women.

On the other side of the room Mrs Jamieson had been enquiring about the wedding Mrs Armour and her cousin had attended. "Ah heard stories that ye were haein' difficulty gettin' hame - swayin' on yer feet" she said playfully.

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[3] shopping

"Nae me. Nor Margaret," replied the cousin stiffly. She was affronted by the idea. "Lime and lemonade aw efternoon. Ah dinna like alcohol."

"Me neither. Ah dinna drink alcohol," said Mrs Jamieson. The subject was closed and the women made strenuous efforts to avoid staring at Margaret, in a flowered dress, as she laboriously wended her way across the room.

"You're looking very nice, Margaret, " I greeted her. She responded with a grim expletive. "Ah wis lookin' through the wardrobe, ken. Ah couldna get ma dresses ower ma bust. But this yin Ah could. Ah haena worn it fur a lang time. Ah canna get the ithers on but Ah'm no' throwin' 'em oot". Disposal of her clothes would yet have been one more sign of her advancing disability and age and the loss of days gone by.

"How are yer eyes?" asked Mrs Muir. She smiled kindly in our direction.

"Och, nae sae bad" Margaret replied, infinitely tolerant of her impediments. She had just been into hospital for an operation to remove a cataract. "But Ah canna see sae weel at a distance. Who're thae standin' by the door?"

It was two of the residents waiting for a taxi.

"Och, that's Mrs Cameron and Mrs Dixon, hen, " replied Mrs Muir.

"Did ye know Mrs Hulme had a cataract operation?" Mrs Muir, referring to Margaret, asked me.

"No, I didn't. Has it helped?"

"Weel, aye" Margaret replied. "Ah can see better maist o' the time."

The residents' remarks illustrate that the presentation of a public face during the coffee morning only just kept in check the underlying emotional turmoil. The prevailing atmosphere was entirely at the mercy of participants. Even after several weeks of attendance, I often felt that I had to take a big breath before entering the lounge; finding the formality of the event and the exclusivity rendered by the range of 'fronts' intimidating. My own sentiments oscillated in tandem with those of the residents: sometimes I would feel warmly welcomed; at other times I would feel distanced, as though I was not sharing and could never share the combination of circumstances and problems which comprised the underswell of unspoken comment.

More than at any other event, the coffee morning at Windsor Court recaptured, week after week, a picture of a group of older women, thrown together, who must co-operate in maintaining a definition of the situation towards those above and those below them. Those that perceived they came from differing backgrounds and social class were hence desirous of maintaining social distance from one another. But in this relation of enforced familiarity, the only way for some was to escape into the relative security of a clique whereby they could be protected from unwanted identification with certain members. Between residents themselves therefore the maintenance of social distance served a different purpose to that enshrined within the interactions between residents and wardens.

The formation of cliques was observed by some as an inappropriate solution to the common problems shared by members of Windsor Court. "If ye have airs an' graces, ye're brocht doon tae a common level here," said Mrs Fleming. "In a way, ye've tae keep on guid terms wi everyone. Whit Ah dinna like is people sittin' in the same chairs talkin' wi the same fowks each time. They wait fur each ither tae come in tae coffee. They ne'er speak tae anyone else."

It was, however, well to make the effort to attend. Regular withdrawal from the coffee morning was perceived by the others as a lack of sociability on the part of the absentee.

Absentees might be considered to be snobs, encouraging the response: "Ach we're nae guid enough fur her"; or moody, and thus ill-tempered 'soor dooks'.

But for the newcomer the coffee morning was intimidating. If friendship formation took as long as it appeared to take, small wonder that friendships which existed between residents and people living outside Windsor Court, when individuals took up residence there, remained intact and considerably stronger than those which were made within the complex. Indeed, some residents employed the assistance of these friends from outside Windsor Court for mutual support and conversation at the coffee morning, rather than be considered unsociable by staying away.

Mrs MacBeth expressed just such sentiments. "Ah normally take the Dial A Ride on Tuesdays - so dinna come doon tae coffee, but try tae mak an occasional appearance sae that the ladies dinna think Ah'm snooty."

Hastily, as though feeling a need to deny the undercurrents of what she had just expressed, she continued. "They're a nice bunch of people here aren't they? Ah thocht

that Ah might find it difficult gettin' used tae livin' in a community like Windsor Court," she continued, "but ye are independent, not alone. Ah widna like tae hae meals brocht tae me. Ah eat much less noo onyway an' Ah've a committed family who look efter me."

And here was another puzzle to be stored and away and sorted out at a later date. Despite the fact that, as Mrs MacBeth had already admitted, she did not often take the opportunity to mix publicly with the other residents, she was quite happy in her choice of the word 'community' to describe Windsor Court. Mrs MacBeth and I had radically different views of what 'community' meant and she, in any case, was merely drawing on one of its many meanings - the sense of community as shared residence. But, as Crow and Allan (1994:4) suggest, communities of territory and interest do not necessarily overlap, neither do they necessarily involve the interaction with other people and the sense of shared identity which are the defining characteristics of what Willmott (1986, ch.6) distinguishes as the community of attachment and to which Mrs Hutchinson referred. This sense of community which, for reasons I develop in the following chapter, seemed to me more cogent and of more relevance for the older people at this point in their life, was not an obvious development of the environment of Windsor Court. Indeed, not only was social integration distorted but it seemed to me that incorporation into socially scripted personhood (described earlier) was, in fact, incorporation into a socially scripted elderhood which, at the same time, denied the real self. Certainly, as a rite of passage, the coffee morning reflected this.

Forms of collective presentation

Despite ambiguous feelings among the women with regard to their attendance at the coffee morning it was perhaps the only weekly event that enabled presentation of their own self-selected, highly controlled image to others. For the individual's 'old' social membership and self-identity were stripped away as they entered the building and this was symbolically revealed at the coffee mornings and at other events. Social arrangements, as a whole, at Windsor Court tended to undermine the ability to express an independent self, thus bringing the person progressively closer to the public image 'elderly'.

Ordinary social intercourse was itself put together as a scene is put together 'by the exchange of 'dramatically inflated actions, counter-actions and terminating replies' (Goffman 1967:74). On entering the scene I entered into the folds of the human landscape within which the women lived out their lives. It was a weekly opportunity to

look inside and bear witness to the heart beat and the pump of the lungs. Being so close to the life-force of the community was often disturbing.

The coffee morning was an occasion that allowed the women to proclaim a self-selected, highly controlled image for presentation to the outsider, peers and themselves. Unspoken messages about sense of dress, self-possession and health reverberated across the room. An individual's absence spoke volumes, leading to questions being asked about her health or mood. To be seen was as good as to be heard. Self esteem was based on the maintenance of decorum and dignity. An effort was made to dress for the event: courtelle sweaters and cardigans in various pastel shades or white blouses predominated, with plain or flowered skirts. The women focused on the upper half of their bodies at the expense of the lower. Hair was permed and neat; small amounts of jewellery, a pearl necklace and ear-rings; and cosmetics - not too much: a touch of lipstick and a dust of powder - complementing without intruding. But the eye, travelling down the body, would often encounter stocking-less legs, where skin sores discriminated against nylon and other synthetic fibres, and worn slippers on feet which no longer responded to being squeezed into leather court shoes.

Such dissonances need to be appreciated, for as Goffman espouses 'the impression of reality fostered by performance is a delicate, fragile thing that can be shattered by very minor mishaps' (Goffman, 1967:63). However, through social discipline, Goffman (1967:65) continues, 'a mask of manner can be held in place from within'. Although, as de Beauvoir suggests, the women may be helped in keeping this pose by clamps that are tightened on the body, some hidden, some showing:

> 'Even if each woman dresses in conformity with her status, a game is still being played: artifice, like art, belongs to the realm of the imaginary. It is not only that girdle, brassiere, hair-dye, make-up disguise body and face; but that the least sophisticated of women, once she is 'dressed', does not present herself to observation; she is, like the picture or the statue, or the actor on the stage, an agent through whom is suggested someone not there - that is, the character she represents, but is not. It is this identification with something unreal, fixed, perfect as the heroine of a novel, as a portrait or a bust, that gratifies her; she strives to identify herself with this figure and thus to seem to herself to be stabilized, justified in her splendour.'
>
> de Beauvoir, 1953

Social versus familiar names

Before drawing this chapter to a close the final point to which I wish to draw attention is the use of names at Windsor Court. In themselves, the appropriate use of names reflected a number of things; it reflected, first, the nature of tacking back and forth between the private and the public; it also related to an unwritten code of conduct and to

the social order; most of all, it reflected the considerable aspirations among residents to retain a sense of self rootedness in possessiveness.

It was only when considering the use of surnames among residents at formal House events that I began to recognise some of the sharper but latent aspects of self-identity emerging. This in itself, should not have been surprising because, the institutional environment can, as Bromley (1978:22-3) argues, constitute a social setting where the effects of ageing on the residents' expressive behaviour are accentuated and made more sharply reflexive.

At first I considered that the formal use of names at House events simply confirmed the fact that the institution was failing in helping its members to relax their guard and feel part of a mutually caring collective. At House events her Christian name was surrendered with, in its place, the formal title of Mrs (or occasionally of Miss) as a sort of ritual means of initiating individuals into House identity. In the outside world Margaret would have been Margaret: wife, mother, grandmother, aunt, stoic, calm, robust and cheerful; in the inside world Margaret was Mrs Hulme, a Windsor Court resident.

Given the limited collective opportunities that people had to get to know each other, events aimed at social integration were, at best, arenas for role enactment, lacking the relational warmth that enabled individuals to indulge in new friendships. Consequently, residents did not know each other - at least, very well. During the coffee morning, therefore, whilst the use of surnames apparently privileged the social definition of each individual over her self-concept, this did not then exclude self-awareness among them. It may well have devalued their individual selves if the practice of using surnames had been foisted on the residents by the wardens. But it was my understanding that this practice of renaming at the performance of the coffee morning was managed and desired by the residents themselves: it was not so much a surrender of the informal name as the adoption of the formal one. It had the obvious advantage of sparing the women the humiliating familiarity of being referred to as 'the girls' - common parlance among care staff in 'homes for the elderly'. Yet, far beyond this, the practice encoded considerably more complex assumptions about the relationship between the residents and society. In particular their desire to be known by the name that best shed them in the image of 'wife' and it was this message that they wished to convey to the others, for the name 'Margaret' conveyed less about its owner than the name 'Mrs Hulme'.

The women exercised their own discretion; fully conscious of the dishonouring effected by admission into a coffee morning for the elderly, they hung onto some semblance of dignity, disregard for which would have been considered a discourtesy. The draw on formality at public meetings launched a tacit appeal for respect and dignity; it drafted up their names on a roll call of honour: names which, unlike their familiar names, uniquely implied their former professions as wife and mother and directly opposed incarceration within the social identity: the elderly. And here we return to Myerhoff's (1984:310) point of paradox that although the use of different names and other symbols of conformity appeared to confer full House membership, reminding the participants that existence outside this group was impossible, yet at the same time it had the paradoxical effect of announcing their uniqueness and individuality. Some of us fell outside this circle of complicity: the wardens were still Betty and Maureen and I was still Jenny. What was being expressed here at Windsor Court, it seemed to me was, as Myerhoff put it, one of the 'basic truths of the human condition: that while all societies attempt to absorb the individual and shape him or her into a bona fide self-regulating member, they never wholly succeed' (1984:310).

Concluding comments

This study of initiation into the body of people at Windsor Court, clearly suggests that induction into this new kind of social membership had the capacity to remake the self. In this context I have explored the nature of the resultant socially scripted personhood there.

It is suggested that some residents sought the continuation of a 'community of the past' - in this sense a community of attachment which embodied a common bond of fellowship influenced by shared expectations, shared interaction and shared identities. Yet without natural heirs or witnesses to validate their individual claims to have lived a worthy life, the elderly were forced to turn to each other. However, this turning, and the consequent integration into social membership and development of a community of attachment, was constrained by a number of features: first, the number of public opportunities for residents to have contact with each other and, more importantly, the lack of opportunities for the ritual display of members' own version of themselves; second, a failure to abstract, promote and develop benefits from the individual portfolios of accrued experience and values; and thirdly, the presence of obstacles to the development of 'real' friendship and consequent impacts on the concept of public sharing and solidarity which symbolised past social order. Thus, when one

resident made reference to the concept of the home as a 'community' this was in a superficial, territorial sense rather than in the sense of attachment.

The development of a new social order within which social membership was constructed, and the integrity of the self maintained, reflected the regulation of private and public spheres in Windsor Court. The forms of self-presentation were reflected during the weekly coffee morning. Within its parameters, the institutionalised self was remade in a social image of elderhood and the essence of the self apparently pushed into obscurity. An example of this was the content of the conversation. Whilst oral and local tradition was drawn upon in conversation as a kind of insurance policy, it was hard for outsiders to participate and it was hard to recognise the accrued personal skills and values implicit within discussions of everyday domestic chores and duties.

More than at any other event the over-riding objective of the weekly coffee event seemed to be the maintenance of a definition of the situation towards others. Not only were boundaries maintained between carers and residents, they were maintained between the residents themselves. The outcome at the public event was the feeling of intimidation or inhibition, leading to the exposure of a 'front' or a self-selected, highly controlled image to others. Yet, as Cohen (1994:73) documents and explores, this perspective is at odds with our own views of our own selves, based on how we think others think of us and how we think of ourselves. The influence of the weekly routine was in fact far more ambiguous, for it was the very same routine that, whilst apparently obscuring the self, managed also to accentuate the reflexive and the effects of ageing on the expressive behaviour of individuals. Because of it's insistence, like the performance ritual, on the self-conscious but, at the same time, precise and accurate dress and behaviour it was distinguished as something set apart from ordinary affairs. The symbolic use of names, objects, language, dress and gestures may engage participants in ritualistic affairs - even those which appear banal and nothing out of the ordinary. The observations on naming, for example, held significance for opportunities for self-development. Whilst merely noting them here, renaming as ritual is explored to a greater extent at later points in the thesis.

Chapter 9

The means through which people construct the terms of their social membership at Phillip House

Introduction

Chapter 7 referred to the idea that different patterns of institutional living depend on the existence of different prevailing ideologies. In evoking the drama of the stage production or the eldritch power of performance, the meaning of life within the sheltered home was susceptible to manipulation by the warden. At both Windsor Court and Phillip House, such manipulation had an extensive resonance within the condensed semantic space of the housing complex. There was however, a startling polarity in the way in which this operated. Within the parameters of life at Windsor Court the wardens' shaping of the social scene led to the institutionalised self being remade in a social image of elderhood within which it seemed that selfhood was pushed into obscurity. Although not quite. For one of the remarkable attributes of the self is its staying power, an attribute highlighted by a number of authors. Cohen (1994:176), for example, argues for the resilience of the self, wherein individuals are reflexively aware of the attempts made by others to shape their selves. He cautions that there is a vital difference between what people think and what they appear to do, with selfhood being found in the former rather than the latter. Similarly, in studies of residents of a Cheshire Home, Musgrove concluded that, even extreme marginality 'does not lead easily and automatically to the dissolution of an established self and a fundamentally reconstructed reality' (1977:15). This ushers in the distinct possibility that, under threat, means are found to cling to earlier priorities and earlier identities, even if this is at the expense of adaptation to current circumstances.

On the other hand it is quite possible for the institutional environment to promote strategies that encourage the rehearsal of earlier priorities and earlier identities that enable, rather than detract from, adaptation to current circumstances. This is the context of the present chapter. It is argued that a number of metaphoric strategies were drawn upon and that these served to mask the institutional process. In her central transforming role, the warden addressed the need to enable the residents to manage and therefore retain fragments of their former lives whilst the larger all-encompassing goal of managing the transitions of old age remained firmly in the hands of the institution.

Passage from culture to nature

Before illustrating these metaphoric strategies, I want briefly to touch on an anthropological argument that reinforces the concept of the development of close solidarity, or 'communitas', among the old resulting from identification through a common rite of passage.

Initiation into a new life stage contrasts what Spencer (1990) terms horizontal unity and vertical subordination. In practice both are complementary features. In western society where vertical subordination is less clear - elderhood being usually subordinate to adulthood - the theme of unity among peers is a clearer line to follow, invoking close fellowship but also cutting across rivalries in other spheres of existence.

Previous chapters have drawn attention to the fact that, almost without exception, the residents lacked the rewards of formal education in their youth; the women, in particular, had also lacked paid employment and had grown old with less self-confidence, less authority and less money as a result. On top of this, as I touched on in chapters 4 and 5, many had spent their lives cultivating values that now appeared to have no central relevance for achieving status as older people.

The work of anthropologists Mayer and Mayer (1990) on adolescence becomes relevant here. Like old age adolescence is widely regarded as a transient phase, marginal to the wider society (Lewin, 1952:142-3; Muuss, 1970:502-3). Mayer and Mayer (1990) describe adolescence among Red Xhosa boys in South Africa. The youths comprise organisations peripheral to the adult community. In direct contrast to the argument above, however, these adolescents, during their development and initiation into adulthood, cultivate values that have a *central* relevance for achieving status as older people. This, Spencer (1990:13) evokes as a transformation from nature to culture, perceived by the Red Xhosa as a passage from the bush to the homestead, from animal to human. They are young men on the periphery moving towards the metaphorical centre.

From the viewpoint of gender one can thus, shift the nature-culture dimension (following Ortner, 1974:83-7) to one of young-old. Compared with the example above, for the old at Windsor Court, the reverse shift occurred. One of the many paradoxes that performance rituals characteristically handle, Myerhoff reminds us, is that 'we mortals belong as much to nature as to culture, that these conditions are inseparable,

that we play seriously and perpetually with our joint membership in the human and animal kingdoms' (1984:307). In old age the residents were like initiates being transformed from culture to nature. They were old people moving from the centre towards the metaphorical periphery.

Yet this is not an obvious conclusion to draw. As Spencer (1990:13) points out, age-systems are supremely governed by status considerations and, reflecting this, Amoss and Harrell suggest that the Lévi-Straussian transformation from nature to culture is reflected in the life course through transition 'from the unruly disorder of childhood to the dignified authority of old age' - from chaos to order (1981:15). Spencer (1990:13) modifies this as a transition to status rather than authority. But, as I will show in this chapter and later on, a vital aspect of peer bonding among some of the old is that of the unruly and disorderly- which allows them to exert themselves in ways which would not otherwise be acceptable - to grow old disgracefully. In this way, in their horizontal bonding, this aspect of disorderly childhood seems to be carried over. And thus one may conclude with Spencer that 'the experience of communitas appears as a universal attribute rejuvenated in adulthood and protected within its ritualised setting' (Spencer, 1990:13).

Metaphoric Strategies in managing old age

The form of social membership that had developed at Phillip House needs to be regarded in the light of the relative immaturity of the complex. I started field-work there only one year after its opening. In direct contrast to Windsor Court, where residents saw themselves as 'new' or 'old' in terms of the length of time they had lived there, at Phillip House, all residents were 'new', having taken up individual residency at almost the same time.

Community reconstruction

Lakoff and Johnson argue that 'people in power get to impose their own metaphors' (1980:157). In the hierarchical ordering of the care at Phillip House, Sandra was aware that she had been given no express orders to do more than provide a basic support service for the residents. In the language of the managers, based at a distance in Edinburgh, the organisation's mission statement stated that the aim was 'to provide a range of good quality housing and related services to people in need of support, in ways which (would) ensure customer satisfaction'. The bricks and mortar of Phillip House were the substantial and literal expression of this mission statement. Sandra,

however, sought to promote this script in considerably broader material form within the House. Born and brought up in Kelty - once Fife's largest coal-mining community - she acted as an important catalyst in mobilising and encouraging interaction among residents. Compared with Windsor Court, communal gatherings at Phillip House were active and vibrant occasions orchestrated, but not necessarily delivered, by the warden. Sandra explained to me that she had initiated a number of activities and taken on responsibilities which had not specifically been requested by the Housing Association employing her. She was not even sure that, within the terms of her employment contract, she was permitted any artistic licence. But she would not have let this get in her way. She believed passionately in personal and individual fulfilment and was vehemently anti-ageist. 'Ah dinna think o' these people as auld - jest simply people.' Her every action bristled with thought, imagination and compassion in a manner that captured the attention of those with whom she worked. The following example is an apt illustration of this.

Getting people fired up

Shortly after the residents had settled into their new homes Sandra had been concerned to find that the coffee mornings she had arranged, in order to help people 'get to know each other' were very poorly attended. Possibly the residents were intimidated by the thought of entering a room full of strangers. Sandra felt it important that she provide assistance to allay fears and to help people to begin to communicate with each other. Her tactic was as follows. She sent each resident a personal invitation to have coffee and a chat with her. Since the residents did not know each other they had not compared their invitations, otherwise they would have noted that the date and time on each invitation were identical. Thinking they were coming for a private chat, they were greeted instead with a group pep talk.

"They were a bit taken aback tae find that everyone had received the same invitation," said Sandra, "but, at furst, naebdy had come tae coffee in the mornin' an' Ah had tae get everyone thegither."

Her speech had been blunt but it had had the desired effect.

"Ah says tae them: 'This is probably yer last hame. Noo, ye can either sit an' vegetate here fur the rest o' yer days or ye can get the maist oot o' it an' enjoy yersels tae the fou. Ah'll help ye tae organise whitever activities ye wid like tae dae here. You maun let me know whit ye want an' we'll see if it can be arranged'."

Sandra fulfilled her pledge. Within nine months interaction and participation had developed to the extent that she was able to comment: "This is a real community an' people dae look tae each ither."

'Real community', in the terms in which Sandra described it meant communal sociability and co-operation. Dawson (1990:126) uses the same term in his study of miners where he describes the system of roles and obligations beyond the household, particularly in times of crisis, as the central celebrated manifestation of the co-operative aspect of community. Rather than simply a territorial community, as illustrated at Windsor Court, the vision at Phillip House was a community of attachment, respecting both the value of a sense of continuing personal identity and providing the means to come to terms with identity changes due to new experiences and different priorities.

Establishment of boundaries

Central to the positive retention of the residents' self image at Phillip House was the development of a House culture, encouraged and mobilised through Sandra the warden. She was aware, however, of the delicate line she herself had to tread. "Ah act as a mediator. Ah try tae stop residents gettin' tae dependent on me or on ither residents." The result was interdependence between residents; and between Sandra and residents, all leading to the objective of empowerment through a sense of belonging. Sandra implicitly recognised that her charges were very much people who saw a shortened horizon before them. Their lack of a structured place in society made the structuring of their own liminality the more critical for it is here, as James (1986:158) explains, that knowledge of the self is gained. And as Burridge argues 'to become it is first necessary to belong; and belonging makes it possible to define just who or what one is' (1969:46).

For the residents to view Phillip House as a community after such a short length of time, however, was an ambiguous achievement with extensive repercussions on the lives they would lead there. Their definition of community arose from perceptions of its relationships to the world beyond its boundaries. Specific features manifested autonomy in relation to the outside world, necessitated by the neglect by that very same outside world. The outside world was a loose, ambiguous term that acted as a convenient metaphor to encapsulate a set of vaguely defined agencies which were seen to exploit the residents. Such a view gave birth to strongly possessive sentiments that Phillip House and its facilities was their home and for their use. This effectively

prohibited the use of the communal lounge by outsiders. When a local organisation requested to run an over-60s club in the lounge, even when this would include residents, there was strong disapproval. On the face of it the residents cited security reasons and the use of the lounge for a number of other in-house activities as mitigating factors against, but there may well have been reasons that they were less likely to vocalise. Chapter 13 draws attention to the vulnerability of relations between the women despite the apparently robust and overarching claim for the existence of 'community'. It may well have been that the women were perfectly well-aware of the fragility of their new relationships and sense of home at Phillip House. The symbolic boundaries framing these, which offered to the new residents a kind of security of integrated identity, would be easily broken down by the intermittent inclusion of others into the complex. Somehow the residents seemed to be seeking a kind of estrangement from the outside world, as if, by doing so, this would commit others to the interdependence of relations within. Yet, perhaps simultaneously, they pushed to the back of their minds the fact that they were also one of those 'others'.

Social membership constructed through metaphoric strategies

Bearing in mind what has been said above I turn now from the abstract to the substantive, with the documentation of four different events at Phillip House: the Annual Christmas Sale; a game of bingo; the monthly Church service; and the monthly residents' meeting. Each of these illustrates something of the range of strategies that initiated Phillip House members into a new kind of social membership and the capacity in which the self was remade. The three strategies are presented sequentially and interpretations and conclusions presented afterwards.

The annual Christmas sale

Special events, like the annual Christmas sale, the overt purpose of which was to raise funds for Phillip House, were not just important in allowing the women to reconstitute a semblance of their former lives. They were also important as a reassurance to both outsiders and residents as tangible revelations of the metaphors through which care was continuously being made available to them.

The sale illustrated the significant role of the warden in delivering the basic ingredients for the development of a congenial atmosphere and an environment where the flowering of sociable relations supplanted the ordinary everyday atmosphere of social isolation. Its purpose was to raise money for general funds. It

offered a literal representation of the figurative concept of community where material and social goods are exchanged in the market place, and of family, since most of the people who came to the sale were the relatives of the residents.

Physical and emotional transactions

I arrived at ten o'clock and the sale was already in full swing. The common lounge was crowded with vendors and purchasers, comprising, respectively, the residents and members of their families. The event diverted all outsiders, whether family or general public, from any confrontation with the literal reality of Phillip House: sheltered home. The majority of space in the housing complex, outside the lounge, was not 'open' to outsiders, their view being guided through the glass front door, now ajar, and along the corridor to the common room. The usually spartan corridors were fringed with residents selling, here, raffle tickets and there, dog-eared books and magazines.

Only certain aspects of life within Phillip House were on display. These aspects of life were figurative. The residents had been transformed into sales-persons. Conforming with traditional gender norms the women controlled the sale of the cakes and baby ware; hand-knitted cosies, and crocheted shawls and dish cloths; whilst the men sat behind the Tombola, touting for custom. The most frail of the women sat in arm-chairs in corners of the room, each being allocated a task which they could readily perform from a seated position. From my position behind the craft stall I observed a steady stream of visitors to these women hosting the 'Guess the weight of the cake' or the 'Guess the name of the doll' stall.

At the door of the common room a wide range of donated raffle prizes accumulated throughout the morning and demand for raffle tickets remained steady. Whilst most of the participant residents had chosen their place for the morning, Sandra delegated work whilst the residents stood in groups behind the loaded trestle tables, acting as vigorous vendors when required and chatting contentedly among themselves when, as the morning wore on, the streams of purchasers began to lessen to a trickle.

The residents who were selling gifts were almost all those who attended the other sociable activities, such as the elder aerobics and the 'reminiscence' group. They numbered perhaps a dozen women whom I had come to regard as the burning, energising core of Phillip House: those who always seemed to be there. Sandra was

both fire-lighter and fuel: igniting the residents' enthusiasm and keeping it at a steady pitch.

Drawing the raffle

Towards midday the room was fast clearing of potential customers. Although there was still a large number of items left unsold, Sandra, after conferring with some of the residents, decided to start the raffle draw.

"Can ye pass me the furst item the noo," she called to a youth positioned by the mountain of gifts beside the door. Sandra cast an eye over the offering, her thoughts caressing some latent ideas.

"Here we've a tasteful Marks an' Spencer's china item," she said in her soft Kelty accent, always submerged with humour. "Wid ye like tae draw?" she asked Mrs Howe. The name on the ticket was read aloud.

"An' it's tae Mrs Hunter, Flat Twenty-Four!" Unlike House events, in this public arena Sandra protected the residents' dignity by referring to them by surname.

There was applause and smiles washed round the room. Mrs Hunter hurried forward to claim her trophy.

"Noo, the next yin is a bath towel - wonderful efter a bath - ye jest tie it under yer boobs an' then yer fit tae entertain." Sandra was warming to her task. Her anecdotal provisions seemed to swarm around and gather strength. Always, from within Sandra's verbal formulations there emerged an array of sexual innuendoes which entertained rather than offended residents.

"Whit dae we hae next?" she asked. "A pink teddy bear an' a bottle o' handcream.

"An..the ticket gaes tae..." - she peered closely at it - "that's ma sister! Ah expect that Ah'll end up wi the teddy bear. No' her style."

The draw continued. "Anither tasteful item frae Marks an' Spencer!" It was Marjorie's turn to win. From her wheel chair she received the gift, smiled with pleasure, then called across the room to her daughter-in-law. Residents' eyes followed her call. "That's yer Christmas, Jan!".

Sandra's sister won again. "It's rigged" cried Sandra. "Och, a hauf[1] bottle o' vodka. Weel, she can keep that. Ah dinna like vodka." She wrinkled her nose and grinned, her warmth and energy driving the proceedings forward.

A game of bingo

The second illustration of strategies to bring about awareness of collective life, is a game of bingo. This game provided the closest means to an emotional and passionate experience for the residents. Winning provided an opportunity for an individual to feel potent; participating, an opportunity to feel part of a greater whole. The game was also the means by which the participants could, for a short time, distance themselves from some of the aspects of life at Phillip House that perpetually reminded them of their destiny, and to move temporarily beyond this.

The common room was full some ten minutes before the game was due to begin. Along one side of the room several tables were pulled together with the women sitting in long lines of comfortable chairs either side. There were two clusters of people seated round other tables, including the two or three resident men. The only other table was a trestle parked in a dominant position, and allocated to the chairwoman, Lottie. On this table the prizes were stacked: tins of fruit, custard, oil or soup and jam, biscuits, soap, handcream and whatever else residents could find to offer as contributions. Each resident had paid a 50p attendance fee.

The atmosphere was anticipatory and congenial, emanating warmth and togetherness. The women had their cards laid out on boards on their laps and pencils at the ready. Lottie started to call:

"Nine oh, top o' the show." She articulated clearly and precisely.

"On its ain, number seven.

Twa fat ladies, echty echt."

There was silence to begin with but, as the calling continued, mellow excitement began to pervade the room.

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1 hauf means half

"Unlucky fur some, yin an' three, number thirteen". She paused and looked up.

"Legs eleven." The room filled with wolf whistles delivered enthusiastically by the women. The men smiled blankly. Ignored by the women, and at the mercy of sexual banter and verbal horseplay they drew comfort from their close proximity to each other, seated in a cluster at the far corner of the room.

Lottie dropped one of her cards on the floor. "Haud on a minute" she gasped as she leant down, scrabbling on the floor for the missing card. "That'll be the yin ye're a' waitin' fur." She picked it up and eyed it suspiciously over the rim of her spectacles.

"A' the sixies, clickety click," she announced.

"Twa little ducks, twenty twa." It mattered little that Lottie was not wholly conversant with the professional Bingo caller's lingo. She was doing a good job and the other women were appreciative of her effort.

"Nearly there - nearly a line," Marjorie, wheelchair-bound and, at 68, one of the youngest residents, whispered loudly through the silence of concentration to her neighbour.

"Ah bin watchin' ye, Marjorie" Lottie called out in good humour. "An' ye're hardly movin' at a'!"

Margaret accidentally dropped a bingo counter down her jumper and, to the others delight, unashamedly searched for it among her large bosom.

"Ah got a lucky board - it's a one-woman board," Betty whispered enigmatically to me.

"Kelly's ee, number one!" shouted Lottie.

"Number ten, Downin' Street!"

"Get her oot!" The women responded immediately, in a unanimous and cheerful cry, barely raising their eyes from their boards.

"Echt an' twa, echty-twa!"

"Ma board's not brocht me much luck taenicht" complained Betty.

"Ach Betty, if ye had a' thing, whaur wad ye keep it?[2]" replied Mary good-humouredly. "Try this yin fur size!" She passed Betty another board.
"Mary's awfy guid tae me" said Betty with a twinkle in her eye. "She feels sorry fur me!"

Interaction was intense; humour gentle. A win was a triumph not just for the winner but for her neighbours. There was joking and banter between the wins. The women may only have known each other by sight before coming to the House. Now they knew each other as kindred spirits. The ethos was of democratic care and sharing, through a range of activities, with a continual emphasis on residents themselves taking responsibility for each other.

The final illustration of strategy is that of the monthly religious service at Phillip House. In the following vignette the mechanisms used to draw people together within the definition of a 'religious service' are clearly lacking. The participants were passive users of the resource provided and it is probable that the women's deference to the Minister, who was at this instance embodied with full power and authority, directly diminished their ability to use the service as a response to ageing and adversity.

The religious service

The Phillip House religious service was a monthly affair. During the service described here, there were twelve people present in the common room, including Dr. Laird, the Minister, who had arrived to lead it. The women sat in groups of four and five around the coffee tables. Wullie was the only man present. Dr. Laird stood in the centre of the room.

"Richt," he said briskly, in the stillness which religious meetings sometimes evoke. "Ah thocht that we might start wi 'A' people that on Earth do Dwell'. But", he cleared his throat, "Ah'm afraid that Ah've forgotten tae bring ma music tape so there'll be nae accompaniment this time."

He set off tunefully and cheerfully. We dutifully followed; the participants staring resolutely at their pages or ahead of them, not wishing to catch each other eyes. I wasn't sure whether this was because of embarrassment emanating from individuals'

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2 'You can't have everything in this world'

varying singing abilities or whether eye contact, followed by empathy, would dissolve into a gush of girlish giggles.

"Noo, this next yin's a wee bit mair difficult," Dr. Laird mused, after the first hymn had been completed. "'Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine.'"

We turned to the number in our 'Mission Praise' hymnbooks and gave a passable rendition of the hymn.

The sermon followed the reading. The theme was the visit of the Magi and the slaughter of the innocents. As Dr. Laird concluded his talk, I glanced towards the other side of the room where Wullie's head had dropped to his chest and from where deep, throbbing snores were emanating. The Minister, looking alarmed at the competition, raised his voice..."an' this love which Herod the King tried tae destroy, is somethin' which keeps on bein' offered tae us.

"It's like..." he paused and looked across at Wullie. "Ah see Wullie's dropped aff - It's like when ye ask someone tae marry ye." The momentum was unstoppable. "If she says 'no' ye think 'weel that's that'. But God keeps allowin' us tae hae a second chance." He looked round at the circle of faces, avoiding Wullie's.

"Weel, Ah think that Ah'll end there." Then, as if we might be concerned, he added. "Dinna fash yersels aboot Willie. Ah'm used tae it." He laughed.

A prayer was then said, for the residents and the outside world. A final hymn was sung and the service ended.

Coffee and biscuits, the next item on the agenda, were the platform for the beginning of the sociable part of the meeting. After twenty minutes, Wullie prepared to leave. "Goodbye ladies" he called into the washing room where several of the women were washing and drying the crockery.

"Goodbye Wullie!" they chorused in return.

"Did ye enjoy yer snore?" one called after him. The women sniggered. Wullie did not hear; his deafness had saved him from embarrassment.

The residents' meeting

Phillip House residents' meetings provided committee machinery for old age collective undertakings. It was the object of such meetings to provide an opportunity for individuals to raise matters of personal or House concern. Grievances might be aired and activities and problems discussed in a forum which appealed to the residents' sense of equity and need for transparency among themselves. The meetings expressed and consolidated the feeling that all residents were socially accessible to and socially equal with one another. By observing who spoke and the manner in which issues were raised the meetings also became for me a vital backdrop to the characterisation of individuals and the emergence of relationships embedded within the daily discourse of Phillip House.

A vignette

Some twenty residents, together with Sandra, sat in arm chairs circling the communal lounge. It was a cold day in late October. On a coffee table in the centre of the room sat two rag dolls for which the women had previously bought raffle tickets to a sum of £43.

The meeting was conducted in a formal fashion. My introductory sessions had left me grappling with the complexity of these affairs since it appeared that the residents were not entirely comfortable with such formality. Each would sit with her hands restlessly agitating a bunch of door keys: one to open her flat and the front door of Phillip House; one key to be given to a friend living outside the House and one key to be left in the office at the entrance. I was reminded of people sharing a common lounge in a guesthouse or hotel. But, as always happened, with the passage of the afternoon, the initially slightly chilly atmosphere would warm as the developing discussion enticed people to 'put in their penny's worth'.

When everyone was seated - 21 women and one man - Jean, who was acting secretary, read out the minutes of the previous meeting. These covered four pages of script, everything from security, drainage problems and the use of external doors to the imminent Christmas sale.

Following the minutes, Sandra asked if there were any matters arising. To fill the ensuing silence she advised the women of her intended dates of absence over Christmas.

"Ah think we need a house vote on that," replied Martha - a twinkle in her eye. The residents were always adrift when Sandra was away. It turned out that she would also be away the following Wednesday.

"A meetin' at the Head Office in Edinburgh fur ma annual review. So it'll either be a stick o' lollipop or a slap on the wrist," she said wryly. "Probably a bit o' baith."

Many of the residents were unaware of Sandra's sacrifices in keeping her hours and attempting to provide the sort of care environment she felt was important for the women.

"Will ye be daein' Christmas shoppin' tae?" enquired Beth beside her.

"Ah can feel it in ma banes!" Sandra said with glee. "Ah can feel it in ma banes that Ah'll miss a couple o' buses hame an' hae tae go intae John Lewis!"

They all laughed as Sandra's humour pollinated the moment.

The notice board in the vestibule had been tampered with and a couple of notices had gone missing - one considered to be quite important: the residents' Christmas dinner list, indicating who was going and who had paid a deposit. The women tut-tutted. The notice board was a significant means of communication. It was not just a potent source of House order but a means of contact within a building that did not readily bring people together.

"Ah dinna ken if somebdy wanted tae write a love letter on the back an' borrowed it," said Sandra, in an attempt to lighten the mood. "Ah looked behind the radiator, but it needed somebdy tae remove four pins so Ah wasnae tae optimistic aboot findin' it there. But ye never know." She sighed.

The patio to the rear of the building was being laid and the last of the works were ongoing. Marguerite indicated that she felt it had been something of a waste of the residents' money. "It'll be a'richt when the trees hae grown - but Ah'll be gone by then!" She laughed tightly. "An' ye're sayin' tae me that they cannae find anither use fur yin thousand poonds there in the garden? Why can the money nae be spent on ither things?"

Marguerite was playing devil's advocate - a role she often assumed at the residents' meetings. She had recently been in trouble with the Housing Association by trying to

settle a dispute with a neighbour without first approaching the warden. She later told me that she thought she was doing the right thing. "But Ah got a richt tellin' aff fae the Housing Association rep," she admitted.

Sarah's neighbour, Joyce, had complained to Sarah about her TV being on too loud. Joyce had followed what she had considered to be house protocol. She had first complained to Sandra as an intermediary and Sandra had then advised Sarah. But Sarah had no truck with this indirect method of communicating a complaint.

"Why can she no' jest hae come directly tae me?" asked Sarah. "It makes it seem that she canna speak tae me."

"She'd fight wi her ain shadow, that ane," whispered Marguerite to Sarah, referring to Joyce.

"We're bein' catty," she hastily explained to me. "Joyce willna mix wi the likes o' us - she ne'er speaks tae us. Still...that's her loss."

Sandra shifted in her chair, ignoring the conversation beside me, and continued with the next item on the agenda which concerned the use of the communal laundry facilities at night. The machine vibrations were a nuisance for several residents whose flats adjoined the laundry room. The residents thought it might be better to lock the door to the room after 8 pm. They were in no doubt that this would be an entirely legitimate move.

"If onybdy has left washin' in the machines then that's their problem," announced Lottie, the matter dismissed.

As the meeting progressed it became clear that there were a number of ways in which residents' absolute requirements of self-control and dignity might be violated and the new-found but fragile confidence dislodged. Two such incidents were discussed during the meeting.

First, there had been a break-in by a 15 year old local boy. He was 'a weel-kent face' and known both to police and residents as Bet. Having gained access to the main ground-floor corridor of Phillip House, he was accosted by four of the women residents. According to them, Bet had been 'charming and apologetic', without attempting to stir up trouble. But the residents were uncomfortable about the ease with which Bet had gained access. They knew also that he would try to force entry again.

The residents considered that he thought them a safe bet: older and less mobile. The general sentiment throughout Phillip House was that Bet was looking for money for drugs and drink.

Although he was considered to be relatively harmless, the fact that he was able to break in so easily had the effect of instilling fear among the women and reinforcing their feeling of vulnerability. Such a violation exercised tight control over whether or not a resident perceived she was able to live independently.

There were a number of ways in which the building yielded security lapses: fire exits were a known problem area, because visitors sometimes left through the fire exits and these were not properly closed afterwards. It was decided that residents should escort visitors to the front door to ensure they did not take any short cuts. Sandra concluded that they should increase security by the use of mechanical means such as additional bolts and locks.

Jean, who was wearing a wig because she had lost all her hair through treatment with chemotherapy, related how she had opened the door to Bet.

"He probably thought he was in a horror film. My teeth were out and my wig wasn't on!"[3] She laughed cheerfully. Sandra replied with humour that she was probably the best security.

A second violation of House norms occurred in relation to a chronic problem of dampness in some of the ground floor flats. This was an important issue because the residents connected the dampness to their physical conditions, stressing that it exacerbated arthritis and other aches and pains.

"When Ah furst come here," said Marguerite, "Ah'd nae trouble walkin'. Noo Ah need specialist treatment fur the stiffness in ma leg. It's the dampness," she announced.

Grace was extremely angry about the situation. "Ma carpet, ma cupboards an' ma skirtin' boards a' show signs o' damp. Ah can hardly sleep fur fear o' wakin' up tae a flood!" she protested.

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3 As revealed in Chapter 7 Jean was English.

The source of damp in the flats was external drainage. A number of artisans and engineers, sent in by management, had tried to get to the route of the problem. The women felt that they had been fobbed off by management with a range of inept solutions and advice. The problem remained. Not only that; it seemed to be getting worse.

"Drainage work's got tae be done in the summer," said Betty. "Ah dinna ken why they canna get it done then. Ah called fur the engineer tae come and he said it wid tak three weeks! An' that's only tae come an' look!" she spluttered indignantly.

Like many people who are long-term sufferers or victims the women had become experts about their problem and were quite sure they knew not only the cause but the way to resolve it. Quite apart from the substantive issue here, management was perceived to have acted insensitively in undervaluing the depth of the problem and in refusing to acknowledge that the women, in tracing the root of their problem, may actually have been able to establish its cause. Their quite inadequate handling of its resolution served only to render the women more impotent and invisible - forcing onto them a humiliating admission of need, even though at the same time reconciling them in their progression as a community. Of course it may well have been that the women were no less powerful than any home-owner striving to deal with a physical problem and knowing that they are at the mercy of the service-provider. The logical conclusion to their circumstances, however, was to make Sandra's self-appointed task of individual empowerment more difficult and challenging.

Some interpretative comments

The development of communitas

A deep sense of community - verging on Turner's communitas - welled-up during the genuinely communal performances illustrated above. This was in sharp contrast to my experiences with some of the same women who comprised the reminiscence group described in chapter 13. It was not simply that the communal activities, such as coffee daily, bingo one evening a week, a Residents' Meeting once a month, provided the necessary stages for interaction; they provided a range of means by which the people present accomplished the development of a collective identity, their interpretation of the world, themselves and their values. They were performances and ceremonies in the presentation of collective knowledge. As a consequence the relationships that established themselves within Phillip House often went well beyond those of simply

neighbourliness. Forms of camaraderie developed, articulated by more than one who explained to me: "Ah'll say yin thing - ye get awfy fond o' people livin' here."

By some unspoken process many of the Phillip House communal events were conducted easily and spontaneously; almost as simply as 'child's play'. Hochschild (1973) comments that 'elderly people are protected within the peer group from society's censure of those who violate age expectations'.

The link between the playfulness of earlier life and the camaraderie of older people has been noted across cultures in studies of peer group behaviour (Spencer, 1987; du Bois, 1974). Observing the Samburu variant of the Maasai system, Spencer suggests that the genesis of communitas may lie in the natural play of childhood. A fundamental source of experience in human relationships is the uninhibited interaction of children as peers and one could argue that some patterns of adult behaviour have their roots in childhood experience (Spencer, 1990:12). In the context of the nature-culture dimension and its relation to different parts of the life cycle, children are seen to be closest to a state of nature. The old, it was argued earlier, are close too. Jerrome comments: 'The sense of community is rooted in the play and the spontaneous enjoyment of childhood which are carried over to the private domains of the older peer group and protected in a ritualised setting' (1992:81).

The parallels between the nature-culture dimension and the young-old dimension are not, however, entirely straight forward. Together with the development of a sense of community within the old age peer group, came the development of a sense of self sponsored by the acknowledgement of the atavistic dualism male versus female. Edith Turner argues that 'ritual does not merely preserve and reflect socio-structural laws; sometimes it breaks them' (1992:6). These communal events and activities had the ability to fracture the same laws, creating an anti-structure, 'a temporary liminal world of reversals that was oddly satisfying, something different from the everyday laws of social custom and political strategies' (Turner, 1992:6), an environment where female could deflate male; and old deflate young. This happened simultaneously; the opposition being gender-related as well as age-related.

Jean La Fontaine (1985:165) notes the variety of festive occasions when women collect together, with a licence to mock the systems controlled by men. The Phillip House women deflated the dignity of the male culture with an assortment of comic sexual innuendoes that highlighted this sort of ambiguity. Comedy manifested itself in a variety of arenas. It was an extremely important expression of paralanguage.

Harrison (1992:80) suggests that one of the main functions of comedy is to dramatise the instability or absurdity of the world as human beings define it. At the same time the women were peers by their subordinate status as well as by age; but still evoking a similar anti-structure with an unstoppable counter-authority of its own. Bingo at Phillip House was a popular event providing just this sort of licence.

At another level of irony the monthly residents' meetings also managed to evoke this sort of absurdity. Indeed, if, as suggested by Myerhoff (1979:186), part of the purpose of ceremony is to allow things to stay the same, one might argue that it was in the interests of the residents to maintain a reservoir of problems blamed upon 'the outside world', for perhaps their very reason for existence as a group depended on the existence of such problems.

The nature of this anti-structure did not even necessarily require a festive occasion in which to express itself. That the religious service was led by one man with women constituting the tiny congregation did not prevent the women from exerting their own silent but often formidable constraints on its progress. Once again, mobilised within the depths of their participation was a just sense of power that they carried deep inside themselves. Theirs was a tribal precept, a wordless understanding of the powerlessness of any male structure to defeat them - a sort of militancy in the face of what, I argue later in chapter 13, they perceived others saw as their essential worthlessness. For the women, old age introduced a second differential to that of the unyielding gender differential with which the women had lived all their lives. These differentials, described by Sontag (1978) as 'the double standard' were, as chapter 13 documents, used by the women in a number of other ways in order to exert force where it was deemed necessary to remind others of who they were.

Concluding comments

Whilst Sandra exercised control over both the literal and the symbolic reality of the experience of living within Phillip House, her strategy was to seek to impress upon the residents the possibility that they themselves, rather than others, had control of their lives. She was acutely aware that although her charges should not be prevented from attempting to shape their own destiny, they did not do so in circumstances of their own choosing. Her means of wardening implicitly reflected this. She invited the residents to take the initiative and to plan, and in so doing to implant within them the value and significance of their own choices over future events. Her desire was for the residents to get as much as possible out of their situation within the limits of their physical

resources, thus transforming events so that they could transcend the banality of everyday existence. Her role was to invert the situation created by the move to Phillip House and to encourage the residents to see the change to this new form of accommodation as a window of opportunity, not as a door closed to the past. Yet, at the same time, Sandra was keenly aware of the necessity of invoking a House situation that expressed ideas of solidarity, interest and identity, all of which, according to Crow and Allan (1994:xv) lie at the heart of community life. For Sandra, 'community' was a key part of the language which she used to describe and legitimise her management of the residents' situation. This management had crucial effects on transforming the literal referential meaning of the housing complex and supplying, in its place, a symbolic set of meanings associated with an imagined community: 'hame' - the home of their childhood. Independence emanated through interdependence; personal identity through the collective.

Having made the residents to a certain extent captain of their own ship, Sandra observed carefully from a close distance, intervening directly and indirectly on a regular basis to advise, counsel, encourage and to channel the residents through some of the more difficult manoeuvres required of them. Through a complex backcloth of human activity (incidental and manufactured encounters with other residents) and a feast of individual experiences residents composed and built their own House culture in order to celebrate and to represent their former lives. In some senses this culture was diffuse and enigmatic, emerging only partially whilst the residents were able to maintain contact with their families and the outside world. Yet its very existence was a major accomplishment and the two conditions characterising the residents: the exercise of continuities between past and present circumstance, and social isolation persistent denominators of its development.

Chapter 10

Construction and reconstruction of self through dimensions of family relationships

Introduction

Previous chapters explored the means through which people negotiated the terms of their social membership in the sheltered homes and the consequent development of sociable relations between peers. This chapter enlarges the picture of sociable relations by examining those between the old and their families - kin relationships being viewed as a special category of social relationship (Finch and Mason, 1993:8).

Jerrome (1993:227) identifies the family as one of the two realms of experience that give form and meaning to adult life - the other being work. In a discussion of the strong ideological emphasis on the family, she writes: 'Not only is one expected to be a member of a couple and a family but exclusion from either type of relationship is viewed as a misfortune, if not a personal failing' (Jerrome, 1993:226). Parker (1976) suggests that the family is society's primary agent of socialization. To this, Skidmore (1994:81) adds that it is the primary source of cementing the meaning of society. Clearly, then, the increasing need of the old, wherever they now lived, to identify the family as a primary reference point in their lives had crucial implications for meeting the needs of personal support, sociability and physical and emotional intimacy.

In this context I wish to address here the following questions. What form do family relationships take and how are family responsibilities negotiated? Is the centrality of family relationships essential to identity adjustment in later life and, if so, in what way?

The perceived importance of the family

The significance of the role of family life is one that has already been highlighted (chapter 5). According to Bond *et al.* the family plays a crucial role in the transmission of values and existing social arrangements from one generation to the next (Bond, Briggs and Coleman, 1993:19-52). Dawson (1990:19) also comments upon the high value placed upon family life in mining communities and certainly this was an extant perception that I encountered among the old with, it seemed, extensive

repercussions on their ability to adjust to their current circumstances. For example, loneliness, the antithesis of belonging as described in the previous chapter, was perceived to be exacerbated by loss of kin. Chapter 4 briefly documented situations where loneliness in old age emerged as a problem. It was, however, a common problem among women and men irrespective of where they lived. Even within the sheltered home, a resident could still be lonely; that environment did not necessarily prevent illness or disability from being significantly isolating features of a person's life. One of the residents of Phillip House, a widower who was 85 years of age, put it succinctly: "The maist difficult part aboot bein' auld is that ye've lost yer freens. Yer wife, yer partner, yer freens - they're a' deid."

Many of the old, both men and women, confirmed their spouse as the main source of friendship and understanding in later years. Mrs Miller, who had first married at the relatively late age of 45, and whose husband had become terminally ill shortly after marriage, sustained a deep emotional attachment to her husband after his death. "Ma husband loved life an' coped wi the idea o' death- nae lettin' this destroy him," she said. "He wis ma great companion an' even noo, three years later, Ah'm nae ower his death. Ah'll ne'er be ower it."

Such revelations concur with Allan's (1979:4) argument that family relationships are viewed as particularly important among the working-class where kin, supplemented by neighbours and workmates form the basic network of friends. Thus the dual dimensions of being working class and living within a residence where it was difficult to make friends from within the reservoir of new possibilities would seem to highlight the significance of the role of family relationships.

Yet it was not simply through death of a relative that older people implied a fragility in the role of family relationships. For many the fragility was a consequence of a far more complex social phenomenon. One of the most important single discontinuities of their lives involved what they saw as the dissolution of the family as they had known it during the earlier part of this century.

Fergus and Bertha, the couple I had met whilst out hill-walking, articulated this for me. "Do you find yourself thinking back on the old days?" I had asked.

"A' the time" replied Fergus. "A' the time."

"Aye. Aften" affirmed Bertha. "An' Ah tell ye, because they were happy days."

"They were happy days but it wis a struggle, ken. Ye had t'struggle!" said Fergus. "An' Ah've nae doot we aften felt unhappy enough. There were aften things we wanted that we couldnae hae, but ye dinna remember them. Ye remember the happy times."

"What made them happy?" I asked.

"The family," Bertha replied, quick as a shot. "The family."

"Do you think we have lost something?"

"Och, aye," said Fergus carefully.

"They dinna ken that they've lost somethin'," explained Bertha - 'they' being younger people today. What Bertha was articulating was the perceived loss of a particular type of family relationship.

"Ye see, the families noo - yin o' them leaves hame. Ah mean, mebbe amicably, but they dinna come back, aften enough. They sort o' lead their ain life awa frae hame," she said.

"Aye," Fergus consented. "It's different. Families are a' spread a' ower, noo, whereas, afore, they wid a' come back agin."

Traditional family - myth and reality?

'Much about modern family life is changing', writes Gillis (1996:3), 'but one thing that never seems to change is the notion that family is not what it used to be.'

Bertha and Fergus's comments suggested that I understood clearly to what they were referring when they spoke about the family. At first I thought glibly that their perceptions of what the family used to be translated into something close to the following. Parents and children lived together; granny and granddad lived virtually next door, and brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles and cousins lived in close proximity: all with a relatively clear understanding of roles and obligations and all contributing to the great 'extended family'. But the more I thought about their family dynamics, the more unclear I became. When Bertha had been discussing her parent's dilemmas concerning her younger brother (chapter 5), there was no mention of family members, other than older children, playing a significant role within the household. When her father was 'blacklegging' it was the local Doctor, not Bertha's grandmother, who 'popped in' late at night to offer reassurance on the child's health.

Research evidence suggests that there has been a change in the role of family relationships as a result of changes in family size (Jerrome, 1993:331). Coleman, Bond and Peace (1993:13) point out, however, that there is a danger of exaggerating the extent to which this has happened, and creating a false myth about family life in the past. Jamieson and Toynbee (1992:xv) argue that we can no longer assume one particular type of family characterising a particular period of history. Their work demonstrates both 'continuity between the past and present, and variation between family households in any given period' (1992:xv).

In their own separate reviews of studies and research on the extended family Jerrome (1993:229) and Finch and Mason concluded that, in the 1990s, it 'was alive and well and had a tangible reality in most people's lives' (Finch and Mason, 1993:163). Yet we must be careful not to confuse the extended family with a sense of stability and unity. Gillis (1996:7) makes reference to research, in the last two decades, which has shown that the fragmentation, instability and discontinuity that we feel so keenly today has been part of the European experience of family life since at least the Middle Ages.

It was difficult to generalise about past family life from the comments made by the residents I worked amongst. Nor would it have been valid to draw a picture of the realities of past family life for individuals because, based as they were on the act of remembering, and perhaps imagining, they were often full of inconsistencies, appearing sometimes to furnish support for rather rosier perceptions of family life than may have been the reality. Yet perhaps what was important for the elderly now was not so much what the realities *had* been, within an objective and external evaluation, but what they *thought* they had been, within a subjective and personal evaluation. For although it was difficult to provide proof in support of individuals' claims about their past family lives, many of the old carried with them deep perceptions that families past were less fragmented, discontinuous and divided than families now. Some pointed to family household tasks and activities as a reification, both a material and symbolic output, of unity.

"Winter evenin's in oor hoose," said Bertha, "were spent roon the fireplace - a coal fire - wi Mum an' Dad sittin' on a chair each wi a lump of canvas on their knees. Nae frame. A huge bit of canvas aboot fower feet lang by three feet. An' ma Dad wid hae spent time an' drew in a pattern on that canvas. Because this wis tae be the new hearth rug and he wis tae say whit colours were tae gae on it.

"Every New Year, at Hogmanay, we had a new hearth rug tae put doon at the hearth. Ma sister an' Ah - we sat an' cut rags. The claes that we wore oot, that didnae fit the next yin doon, were a' washed an' put in a bag - the rag bag. An' the rag bag came oot an' we cut it intae strips an' ma Mum an' Dad made rugs. Every year we got a new rag rug."

"Some fowk made them on a frame" interrupted Fergus. "A big wooden frame".

"Ah ken," replied Bertha. "But ye couldnae mak a big yin on a frame. Ye wid hae tae hae a stand tae put it on.

"Hogmanay wis the time fur the new rug. Afore the New Year come in, the cleanin' had bin done but the hearth got swept up agin. Everythin' wis clean an' the new hearth rug got put doon on the lino."

This practice was not universal. Bertha was unable to recall any other households in their road where it was carried out. Yet it was certainly a fairly common sort of practice, at least in 'the more careful homes' (Hoggart, 1958:36), where the making of what he terms a hearth clip-rug would periodically take place. Jamieson and Toynbee also include a reference by a farm servant's son, to the practice: 'What we did on the long winter nights was made these bloomin' rugs' (1992:130), but with the implication that the idea of the family uniting in an enjoyable pastime was rather less edifying and unifying than it was made out to be.

In gerontology during the 1960s and early 1970s, considerable energy was spent in opposing the widespread belief that older people were alienated from their extended families and, indeed, that the extended family existed at all. The work of social scientists in America, in particular, drew attention to how family neglect of older members had been mythologized (Shanas *et al*, 1968),and that, for a significant proportion of old people, their children lived in close proximity, interacted frequently and were an important component of their care. The American studies cited by Jerrome (1993:230) may dispel the more pessimistic views about the physical and emotional severance of the old from their families, but, as she cautions, it is one thing to employ a static, historical approach to understand how the old and their families maintain intergenerational bonds, and quite another to use this material to judge the meaning of dependency or the expectations of autonomy and involvement by the old whose own experiences of family life span many decades of change in family structure and processes. The perception of older people about their contemporary family life includes a historical dimension, together with a deeply embedded concept

of family as 'tradition'. The tradition of the family provides refuge amidst the constantly changing framework of their lives. But, as Gillis (1996:5) argues, the notion of the traditional family is a myth many people live by. This may be because family relationships are, according to Strathern, 'conventionally taken as embodying primordial ties that somehow exist outside or beyond the technological and political machinations of the world, that suffer change rather than act as a force for change. Indeed, the enduring ties of kinship may be regarded as archetypically traditional in antithesis to the conditions of modern life. The wider the network and the more extensive the reach of kin relations, or the more emphatic the solidarity of the family, the more traditional they seem' (Strathern, 1992:11).

The operation of family responsibilities

Whilst the ties of kinship may have appeared traditional, there was no clear or formal tradition among the elderly about how these ties operated. External family members *did* provide support but there were as many of the old trying to *avoid* reliance on relatives for assistance, as those who routinely expected to call on it. In their comprehensive study on kinship ties, Finch and Mason (1993:166) argue strongly against the idea of 'obligations' and 'duties' associated with family relationships. Whilst they make the comment that it is more likely that parents and children will *help* each other, than will other relatives (1993:164,168), they stress that there are no fixed rules of obligation[1] - arguing that these are more appropriately termed 'responsibilities', characterised by being both fluid and negotiable and being '*created*' through a process of negotiation, rather than flowing automatically from specific relationships (1993:167, emphasis in original). These interpretations are reflected by Jerrome (1993:231) who observed that ties between elderly parents and their adult children were increasingly governed by sentiment rather than obligation. From my own findings I would suggest another perspective: that of an inseparability between obligation and sentiment; the two being inextricably linked.

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[1] Comparing parent-child relationships with other kin relationships, Finch and Mason argue against the pattern of responsibilities in the former being in a category of their own. However, they do suggest that 'the conditions under which people live their lives make it more likely that parents and children will develop commitments to each other', but add that 'the underlying processes of developing commitments are the same for all categories of kin' (Finch and Mason, 1993:168)

"Ah get lonely at the weekends," commented Mrs Beverley. " Ye see a' thon ither fowk hae family an' visitors but Ah've only got ma nephew. Efter church on Sunday he brings me back here. But he cannae stay. He's got his ain family an' bairns."

The realities of family support for residents at both Windsor Court and Phillip House varied from person to person. Finch and Mason vigorously defend their argument that no-one has a right[2] to claim assistance from a relative (1993:166), referring, instead, to the concept of developing commitments (1993:167). Yet, whilst their comments may have held true for the participants in their own survey, there was certainly, embodied within some of the conversations I listened to, a sense of a right or an expectation of assistance. In particular, some of the elderly, in relation to children and grand-children, *did* seem to feel that they had a right to expect support, even if this right only extended to the expectation that children would keep in touch with them. Feeling that theirs was something of a right, however, did not mean that the elderly were surprised when their children failed to live up to their expectations. Whatever the nature of support it was treated as an unremarkable experience. In their studies Finch and Mason (1993:163) pointed out that the experiences of giving and receiving help were treated as unremarkable. It is also true to say, however, that in the sheltered accommodation an *absence* of support and help was also treated as unremarkable. This latter situation seems to reflect a comment by Seabrook in his conversations with elderly people. He concludes that: 'It isn't that the old feel abandoned by their young; it's just that there is a diminished sense of joint enterprise in life across the generations, of shared values, of a common project' (1980:118). It is, he suggests, an 'incalculable loss' of which the old are all 'victims'; the interruption in continuity of experience with those they love most dearly.

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[2] Finch and Mason argue that this holds true for both parent-child relationships and other kin relationships. Whilst commenting that parent-child relationships appear strongest 'down' the generations (1993:168) they account for this through the social relations of child-rearing in our society. 'When children are young, parent-child relationships are *defined as relationships* in which parents take responsibility for the material and emotional welfare of their children. We are suggesting that the effects of this may flow into adult life, making parent-child relationships down the generations the only relationships in which someone can be held morally "accountable" for how someone else "turns out" in adult life' (*op.cit*: 168, emphases in original). This, they argue, sets the conditions conducive to developing commitments and, whilst this will be the case much more commonly for parents and children than for other kin, 'the processes would be the same for all categories of relative' (*op.cit:* 169).

> ....Many of the old grew up in a world where they had had to be disciplined, frugal, stoical, self-denying, poor; and what this taught them, often in bitterness and pain, often appeared to be of no use to their children and grandchildren, who had been shaped for different purposes by changed circumstances....
>
> Seabrooke, 1980:118

The change showed itself as disappointment in the parents. Relationships between individual members of a family in a vacuum were much more liable to strain than relationships that occurred within a sense of wider common purpose. More than anything else, as Seabrooke describes so well, 'there emerged a wistfulness in relation to the children, as though they failed to give just quite enough of themselves' (1980:119).

Even Elizabeth, who lived with her children and came along to the Monday Lunch Club, complained of this. "The television is ayeways on. Naebdy talks any mair.

"The gran'children dinna e'en look up frae whit the're daein' when Ah walk in."

Only a minority were, however, actually critical of their children. Mostly they justified the nature of support received with expressions such as: 'Och, they're very busy.' 'O' course, they have their ain life tae lead.' 'Ah canna expect them tae be at ma beck an' call.'

But, as one woman counselled: "Ye love yer ain children mair than ye love yer parents, ken. Ye gae on lovin' them, e'en when they're grown up an' independent. The only consolation Ah hae is that it's a lesson they'll hae tae learn in their ain time."

The moral dimensions of exchanges

Were family responsibilities able to be wholly fulfilled along a material dimension - by the exchange of goods and services - children or grandchildren would have been assigned a role which was considerably easier for them to fulfil. Much more was at stake, however, than just the material dimension. In order to understand the full significance it was crucial to recognise the moral dimension too. Using Finch and Mason's (1993:170) definition I take the moral dimension of support to mean that people's identities as moral beings are bound up in these exchanges of support, and the process through which they get negotiated. Further than this, because the process of negotiation and exchange is so dependent on the extant identity of the elderly person then it follows that this, in itself, must significantly influence the development of kin exchanges. Thus, 'through negotiations about giving and receiving assistance, people are ....constructed and reconstructed as moral beings' (Finch and Mason, 1993:170).

In the next part of this chapter the ethnographic evidence is brought to bear on this particular aspect.

The negotiation and mediation of family tensions

'All children leave their parents behind', states Myerhoff (1979:93) and, to be sure, Jim and Jean understood that the completeness of the break between generations was in some way inevitable. Because, however, they, like their peers, counted family ties as the only completely trustworthy relationships, it was extremely painful to feel distanced from their kin. This was especially so because, as they explained to me, they felt that their children's perceptions of them now emanated from what they regarded as superficial characteristics such as physical ability and illness.

For 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Jean attended to all the needs of her husband, Jim. Because he was unable to walk he had to be helped from bed, to wheelchair, to armchair in the morning, and to make the reverse transfers in the evening. Jean was ten years younger than her husband but, as her own illness progressed, she felt overburdened by the constant physical dependency of her husband. Jim was aware of this and they discussed what to do and decided that, for one day a week, he should make use of a nearby centre with a respite unit. The centre had well-furnished individual bedrooms, constant therapeutic care available, and a wide range of activities which Jim would be free to use at his leisure.

Given Jean's ill health the use of neighbouring respite care facilities for Jim seemed an eminently sensible idea to me. One day, however, whilst visiting them, I asked how they felt they had settled into their new home at Phillip House. Our conversation drifted towards recent encounters with their children concerning their decision to make use of the respite facilities and it emerged that they had had considerable difficulties persuading their children of the morality of their course of action.

"This is really a new life..", Jean commented, "and we have seemed to have settled down to it very well. But", she sighed, "our family - we have six sons - they haven't really integrated into our new way of life at all!

"We are now in a situation - working life is past. We're beginning to realise the benefits of old age: you can sit back, relax, not worry too much, read your newspaper. In a way it's all about survival and getting the best out of the day still. But our young people - they all came up last week - they think of us as having very sad lives!"

Jim chuckled.

"No," countered Jean, thoughtfully. "This has become clear since last week. I see it now from their perspective. Jim going over there to this centre - which he didn't like the idea of at first and didn't much enjoy at first, but he's now getting more into it - and he's surrounded by people who are in a much worse condition than him. - people who've had strokes...you know and are like this." She demonstrated with her hands and grimaced. "People who are just faces", she explained.

"Now, to them - these young ones - they think it's awful that Jim is in there surrounded by people like that". Jean continued, a note of pain in her voice. "It's made us feel hurt and aggrieved..and we have had to talk about this. And they actually said - 'they' - those other people at the Centre - 'are such sad people'. "But we don't feel like that at all!"

She was silent for a moment and then commented. "You start to examine it - why do they think like that? It's really quite interesting.."

"Ah can understand it frae their point o' view," Jim said generously. "We're auld - thae see oor lives i' their terms - thae widna like tae live beside them.."

"They've had a conference!" Jean's voice rose indignantly. "All the boys..without us, which Sandra (the warden) thinks is hilarious," she said dryly, "because we're the principal people they're discussing and yet they don't want us to hear what they're saying! It's crazy isn't it really?"

Then, in an unconvincing tone, she said "I mean we're not really concerned. We're just two old people that they're discussing!"

With feeling she then remonstrated. "They've forgotten that we are still Mum and Dad. We're not the Mum and Dad that they grew up with - at least to them...they think I am going to dump Jim in the centre so I can get a break, but," she continued, a defiant edge to her voice. "We both agree that this is what we want to do. I'm not dumping Jim!"

Some interpretations

Jim and Jean's exchanges with their children illustrate clearly, within the moral dimension of family life, the potential for conflict and for outcomes which suited neither them nor their children. The extent to which Jim and Jean acknowledged or strove to counteract the resultant relationship with their children was highly attuned to the changing convictions of parent *vis-a-vis* that of sons and daughters. Pride and

autonomy were passions for Jean and Jim. For years, both had seen themselves as givers, not takers. They had devoted considerable effort towards supporting others more needy than they. Jean's explanation was riddled with feelings of guilt and concern over her increasing inability to provide the care and service she had always been capable of providing in the past - knowing that if she did not care first for herself then this ability would continue to diminish. Yet, on those terms, she felt that her children were constructing for her an identity which clearly detracted from how she wished to be seen. Having spent all of her life as the primary care-giver - first for her own young children; then for the old - Jean was dismayed that her children responded in this way[3]. She was unable to acknowledge one particularly important aspect of this on-going reconstruction of identity in relation to family responsibilities: the inversion of the dependence-independence dimension (Finch and Mason, 1993:170). Jean's desire was to strive to ensure her independence from her children; but her children had already renegotiated their parents' position as dependants. Conflicting ideas of how they wished to be seen were thus forced to co-exist.

Blythe (1979:35) has described the situation where children, confronted with the prospect of looking after their parents needs - even if the issue is an emotional rather than a physical one - feel imprisoned by them: their parents cease to be so and become, instead, dependants. This sort of emerging relationship is not lost on the old and they make their protest indirectly and often in performance ritual, arousing guilt in those with whom they are angry without having openly to state the agonies of their loss of self-esteem.

Jim and Jean's concerns expressed themselves at a wider level. As chapter 7 suggested, many of the residents knew that they were expected to exhibit qualities like 'calmness', 'serenity', 'wisdom', 'caring' and so on. But these supposed attributes jarred the sense of honesty among them. It was easier, perhaps, to claim that the young just didn't understand. How could they? What old age taught was selfishness, a flame of pure necessity through which each had to pass. And something strange happened to them as they went through this transition. It connected them to each other. They became so expert in caring about themselves that they understood that same care as it existed in others, and could judge it with an emotionless neutrality. The result was

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[3] Jean's response may also be understood in the light of a comment by Finch and Mason that, in general, women seem to be 'more firmly locked into sets of responsibilities to relatives, (whilst) men are more peripheral' (1993: 165).

that they discovered true generosity. Jim's agreement to spend a period of days in the respite centre was simply a way of allowing him to alleviate some of the pressures that he and he his wife lived among. He could afford to go at that time; Jean could not afford not to have a break. That was all. This gift to his wife carried no obligation. Virtue and necessity were the same.

Connections between moral and material dimensions of exchanges

Finch and Mason (1993:172) argue that the moral and material dimensions of kin exchanges are finely interwoven. In the example above it is possible to see that Jim and Jean's family 'was not working' on a moral level. The couple recognised that their children were trying to negotiate their lives 'above their heads'; they recognised their children's crude attempts to renegotiate their situation. As husband and wife, Jim and Jean had tried, between themselves, to remain relatively independent from their children. Their children's interference not only detracted from their independence but forced Jim to feel 'beholden to' Jean and *vice versa*. Confrontation with their children had forced Jim to explicitly acknowledge his dependence on his wife and Jean to explicitly acknowledge that she required assistance.

Whilst Jim appeared to tolerate his children's concern for his circumstances, justifying it to me within the terms 'they don't understand', this could not hide the need to protest. Protestation was indirect and finely calculated in order that Jim could justify to himself that he was not always on the receiving end and that his kin were still, in some instances, 'beholden to' him. He constructed a sort of negative reciprocity. In the following example, the material value of the exchange is taken into account in reckoning the moral dimension of the exchange.

Jim, Jean and I were coming towards the end of the recording session, when the telephone rang. Jean hurried to answer it. The caller was her son, Steven, and she picked up the cordless 'phone and went into the kitchen. Jim and I could hear her chatting away whilst we carried on our conversation.

"I've asked Steven - for the first time, today." Jean said, on finishing her call. "Did he go away with that book - to get it valued for you?" She was speaking directly to Jim. "And he didn't. It's sad news isn't it?

"He's supposed to have a copy of Burns," she explained to me. "The Kilmarnock Edition'.

Jim had wanted the book to be returned to him. It embodied both material and emotional value. "Very valuable. Very valuable," he emphasised, shaking his head. "It wis in this hoose an' it went oot o' this hoose, an' Ah think...."

"He keeps accusing one of my daughters-in-law: Lawrie's wife, Lynn." Jean interrupted. "But she keeps insisting that they haven't got it and he thinks that she's just hanging on to it because it's valuable and I keep trying to pacify him and say it was Steven who went away with it because Steven said he'd get it valued in London. But..."

"Steven wid've said somethin' aboot it by noo," muttered Jim. "Naw. Ah think Ah'm richt. Lynn's got it!"

"Well - you'd have given it to Lawrie and it might still be in the house," said Jean, trying to humour Jim.

Jim did not think much of this. "An' there's anither ane - the classic edition - that's the yin she brocht back tae me - thinkin' that wid pacify me. But it's nae the yin!"

"One thing this illness has done" Jean commented, "it's just destroyed all tact or discretion! He just says: 'No. That's not the copy'." She laughed, greatly amused by her husband's directness.

"Weel, Ah ken ma books! Ah've bin harbourin' them many years!" Jim's exasperation revealed the depth of his emotions; his responses were a direct retribution. The failure on the part of his children to return something so precious to him had become symbolic for wider failures he attributed to them: in terms of respect, integrity and honesty.

"Yes - but as soon as she comes in the door," Jean directed her conversation at me, "I think 'Oh no - here he goes'. I give him a warning look but, no, he's away..." she smiled with enormous affection tinged with exasperation. "He says immediately - 'did you ever find that book?'" She laughed again as though she could not quite believe that it was her husband, the Minister, who was responsible for this lack of social grace.

"Naw," said Jim firmly, immune to his wife's sentiments on the subject, "that's the *only* person Ah think who could hae it."

"Well," replied Jean knowingly, "there's another possibility that Neil took away boxes of books when we moved."

"But Neil's bringin' 'em back gradually! Naw. Nae Neil. Ah dinna think Neil..."

"We haven't got the room," countered Jean.

"Jean!" Jim pleaded. "The trouble wi the Kilmarnock Edition is nae many people ken its value".

"How did you get this one?" I asked.

"Ah buried this woman," replied Jim. "An' her husband wis English. Efter the funeral he wis in a hurry tae get awa ower the Border - Ah think he must hae had another lady love lined up - a second wife ye ken. An' he had a few ither books - but that yin in particular, Ah ken its value.

"So he wis gaun tae put them in the bin, y'ken, y'see he didna ken the value o' it, an' Ah thocht t'mesel, 'weel, Ah'll hae that, an' Ah'll hae that, an' that,' because they were gaun tae the bin -

"An," he pointed to his heart. "Ah hae it in here an' Ah'll nae rest until Ah get tae know it."

Jim was probably aware that it was unlikely that his book would be returned to him. As far as I know it never was. Despite Jim's passion and the revelation of the emotion he felt through this oversight on the part of his children, both he and Jean found comfort in their spiritual trancendency of life's hurts and problems.

Many of the residents of Phillip House and Windsor Court expressed their spiritual yearnings in a similar sort of way, not through Church life but, most commonly, in relation to people: children, grandchildren, parents, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives. As Seabrooke identifies, in his conversations with old people (1980:119), they would use religious imagery such as: 'He adored me;' 'I worshipped that child'; 'I revered my mother'; 'She was the apple of his eye'; 'That child was life itself to me'. But, as he also concludes, 'the very intensity and absoluteness of these expressions (bears) within them the seeds of disappointment, because human relationships cannot be maintained at that pitch through time without abatement or loss' (1980:117).

This truth was also reflected in the testimony of the residents. Time and ill health were increasingly threatening to sever their links with their children. Often the way in which these difficulties between ageing parents and their children were expressed was as 'a vague, unidentified malaise' (Seabrooke, 1980:119). This was a metaphor for 'the feeling of weakened emotional support from those they love, of strangely impoverished human relationships, of isolation and growing remoteness from their own flesh and blood' (1980:119).

As a support system, then, Jim and Jean's experiences revealed their kin group to be unreliable, a characteristic noted also by Finch and Mason (1993:164). It was not even as though Jim and Jean had asked for support. They were unwilling recipients of their children's attention, preferring recourse to this as a last resort.

In interpreting this example of kin relations in this way, I recognise that it is easy to define the resultant relations entirely in negative terms. Yet, this would not be an entirely appropriate note on which to finish. For whilst Jean's children's responses puzzled and hurt her, compounding her sense of guilt, yet, seen from another perspective, they demonstrated the very opposite of indifference. Her children's responses were a powerful indication of their caring: of the irrefutable connection between parent and child - that distinctive 'something' of kin relationships (Finch and Mason, 1993:169). Her children's expressions of concern, even though they led to conflict, were proof of caring. They were, as Myerhoff (1979:187) has argued, in another context, a basic form of remaining attached.

Where moral accountability disappears

A much more severe censure on relationships occurred when there was no response at all. The demonstration of aloofness, coldness and indifference by one's children was the ultimate form of rejection and a drastic punishment tantamount to physical death. It produced in the sufferer a feeling of desolation rather than merely isolation. Such severe breakdown in family contacts were significant and perhaps more so because they were rarely discussed, particularly if relationships with kin had been severed as a result of disagreement. Usually at the Windsor Court coffee morning it was possible to avoid the discussion of potentially emotive or embarrassing relationships, but certain periods of the year such as Christmas introduced, as the following vignette illustrates, the subject of kin relations with uncomfortable regularity.

"Whit are ye daein' fur Christmas, hen?" asked Mrs. Muir of Elsie.

"Ah dinna ken," Elsie replied. "Ah dinna ken whither tae gae tae ma gran'son or ma gran'dochter. Ah think Ah'll probably stay at hame."

At first, it seemed that she did not wish to offend either of her grandchildren by going to stay with the other but, later in the conversation, it emerged that this ploy was a necessary means of retaining power over the boundaries drawn between them and her.

"Och but that's a shame tae stay in at Christmas, tae be alone," exclaimed Mrs. Muir.

"Weel, Ah'm nae bothered, hen," replied Elsie. "It's a Sunday this year an' Ah'll jest treat it like ony ither."

"Aye," Mrs Muir began to reason with herself. "Whit's Christmas - except a day like any other? Mebbe there'll be some guid programmes on the television. There's the Queen's Speech an' usually a few other guid programmes." She turned to me.

"Weel, Ah'm gaun tae ma family as a'weys, but..." and she turned back to Elsie "...Ah can understand yer difficulty."

"Weel, ma gran'dochter wis on the 'phone aboot it. But Ah've no' seen nor spoke tae her a' year. Ah'm gettin' awfy fed up wi bein' kicked roon like an auld boot!" she said indignantly. "It makes me wonder why she's jest askin' me the noo when she's nae bin in touch a' year"

Aye," Mrs Muir assented, "a'maist as if she feels she has tae ask ye."

"Ah wis at ma grandson's last year an' Ah liked gaun there weel enough but..." and she went on to articulate why she felt that she would not bother to go again.

Elsie's lack of attention from her grandchildren plainly hurt. "Ah told ma gran'dochter that because she didna come tae see me Ah thocht that Ah'd done sumpin' wrang. Ah says tae her 'Ah feel as if Ah've done sumpin' wrang. That's why ye dinna visit' Ah says." She hesitated uncomfortably, twisting her hands in her lap.

"She says it's because o' work an' they're sae busy," she explained.

"But jest a telephone call, jest tae let ye know they're thinkin' aboot ye," said Mrs. Muir. Then she asked gently. "Ye've got a dochter, haven't ye?".

"Aye, but Ah ne'er see her onymair. Ah've bin here fower year an' she's only come tae see me twice. Ah dinna ken what Ah've done tae stop her visitin' but she ne'er comes onymair". Then, with great emotion she revealed. “An' tae me she wis ma life!”

She paused, then explained, "Ah think her husband stops her comin'."

"Och, that's sad, that's awfy sad, Mrs Hay," said Mrs Muir in a horrified but subdued tone. "Even if her husband dis object, ye'd think she'd be woman enough tae say she's still comin'. Ye canna dae everythin' yer husband tells ye tae dae!" And she looked to me for support. "Where dis she bide?" she asked.

"In Kincardine."

"An' Ah'm sure ye were a guid mither tae her," said Mrs Muir, still trying to establish a reason for her companion's feeling of ostracisation.

"Ah was the best mither ye could be," Elsie declared "Ah a'weys looked efter ma young anes."

Helplessly Elsie could only now perceive her children as though from afar, across some frontier. I read in her statements a kind of despair, an acceptance of stunted dreams. In the bleak terrain of her own life stretching before her without stint, she could no longer lay claim, as could other women, to the oasis of her family.

"It's dreadful when ye hear girls sayin' they canna get alang wi their mithers. Ah loved ma mither. Ah adored her!" exclaimed Mrs. Muir.

"Ah loved ma mither too. Och she wis wonderful. Ah wis awfy sad when she died".

Quite suddenly, the coffee room seemed to have emptied. "They're a' awa hame," said Elsie and sighed. It was an unfinished cadence which left us feeling ill at ease. Elsie wanted to accompany two of the other elderly ladies as they were leaving the room but they did not hear her request for them to wait for her and, in her hurry to struggle to her feet, she twice collapsed back into her chair. She finally got to her feet, smiled at Mrs Muir and myself and shuffled her way out of the room.

Concluding comments

In an empirical sense kin relationships, particularly those with children and grand-children, featured significantly in the lives of the old. That such relationships were a source of pride and achievement has already been noted (chapter 1); that they were a source of moral and material support was a rather more ambiguous dimension.

Many of the old signified that kin, especially spouses, were their greatest friends, and therefore left, upon their death, a dependent relationship which it was hard to replace. At the same time, they were aware of a second fragility to kin relationships. This related to a less explicit but more generally perceived social phenomenon concerning 'the dissolution of the family' during their lives; it also related to subjective and personal evaluations of how they remembered family life in the past. Examples of joint tasks and a sense of unity of purpose within the family were given.

How family ties and responsibilities operated was not, in any sense, fixed. But whilst other studies, particularly Finch and Mason (1993:166), argue strongly against the idea of 'obligations' and 'duties' associated with kin relationships, even parent-child

relationships, I found that it was clear that many younger family members *perceived* their role to be an obligation or a duty. As a result, caring, companionship and emotional needs were often poorly served by family. Whether or not support was given, it was treated as an unremarkable event, although the complete absence of support from children was certainly frowned upon.[4]

There was a deeper undercurrent, too. Whilst these older people may themselves have perceived that their younger family considered their role to be obligatory, they wanted their family to deny this, to masquerade if necessary, simply to offer an expression that their role was governed by feelings of 'wanting to' rather than feelings of 'ought to'. Chapter 13 reveals this sort of moral obligation to be so deeply embedded within their own culture, that it governed their very self-expression. Perhaps that was why, for some it was difficult to accept that their children seemed unable to draw upon the same resource.

The negotiation of family responsibilities operated along both material and moral dimensions. The example of Jim and Jean's communication with their children reveal that their own identities were bound up in these exchanges of support and the processes through which they were negotiated. They themselves were constructed and reconstructed as moral beings. The outcome of their 'negotiations' with their children left them feeling less as individuals, rather than more; unsupported, rather than supported. Yet, at the very least, their children's interference was an expression of attachment; proof, through indirect means, that they cared. Perhaps it was better to have that proof, even though it hurt, than to have no tangible evidence of any kind at all.

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[4] In Scots Law, up to 1822, a husband was bound to support his wife's indigent parents and, for some time after that, it was unclear whether or not the law provided for a wife to retain a claim on her husband to help her support her old mother (Clive and Wilson, 1982). This suggests the sense of a persistent obligation upon children to their parents, especially when the latter are old and indigent.

Section 4

Ambiguities in the role of ritual performance

'The legitimate performances of life are not "acted" or "put on"'

Ervin Goffman, 1971:73

Chapter 11

The performance of re-membering and re-working the past

The scope of this section

This section deals with the ambiguous role of performance ritual in the establishment of meanings of selfhood and identity. This is an issue remaining largely unresolved, with regard to the interpretations placed on previous ethnography, and my intention here is to address it in the context of the relation of ritual to reflexive knowledge.

Reflexivity is the work of paying attention to our experience (Daly, 1996:46). It is at the root of our awareness of time, our consciousness of the past, present and future being fundamental to our lived experience and fundamental to our experience of change and growth (Daly, 1996:46). It is thought that there is a tendency for the drive for reflexive knowledge to increase with age; old age being associated with growing consciousness of self and philosophical and eschatological reflection (Myerhoff, 1984:315).

In dealing with the relation of ritual to reflexive knowledge I have drawn upon different situations to support my interpretations: chapter 12 focuses on the railwaymen's oral history group and chapter 13 on the Phillip House reminiscence group. In this chapter, I document two contrasting ethnographic episodes at Windsor Court. All of these dramatise a symbolic reality, bringing to life ideas and wishes that may not have emerged in any other way. This is the mould in which this section is cast. To begin with, however, I offer some general comments on the relation of ritual to reflexive knowledge.

The relation of ritual to reflexive knowledge

The relation of ritual to reflexive knowledge, Myerhoff (1984:316) reminds us, is always complex, ritual having the capacity to both still and arouse reflection. Ritual both draws individuals together and yet enhances self-consciousness. Drawing on the evidence of earlier chapters, it may legitimately be argued that it was under the very conditions where the enclosed society of Windsor Court or Phillip House attempted to absorb and integrate an individual and shape him or her into a legitimate, self-regulating member, that the individual was most likely to experience a sense of radical aloneness, separateness and personal autonomy. Myerhoff suggests it is by

this means that the rite of passage thus announces both 'our separateness and individuality and at the same time reminds us most vividly that existence apart from the group is impossible' (1984:310).

My intention in this section is to reveal the evidence for such separateness and individuality through situations where the old create their own group opportunities to reminisce. Through this performance participants agree upon and make authoritative the essential ideas that define them. It is the collective aspects of the performance, however, which determine the possibility of both a collective and individual symbolic experience through the emergence of reflexive knowledge. Indeed, Turner (1995:251) argues that apparently individual memories are only possible in the social context of interaction. In the following illustrations participants develop, at one and the same time, their collective identity, their interpretation of the world, their selfhood and their values.

The state of non-belonging

It was noted in chapter 2 that the degree of social and ceremonial specificity surrounding old age is generally less than that accorded earlier phases in the life cycle (Myerhoff, 1984:308), offering to the old a sort of cultural vagueness - a liminal existence given over to the principles and practices of uncertainty, exploration, innovation, rebellion and various states of non-belonging. At the same time the stereotypical and institutionalising specificity surrounding old age may be generally more than that accorded earlier phases enhancing a sense of personal fragmentation and a consequent quest for selfhood. This presents a dual invitation to the development of selfhood. By their denial of self, social structural features surrounding old age may, perversely, augment the hegemony of self over collective identity.

With its built-in affinity for paradox, symbolic and social opposition and disorder, liminality is congenial to the generation of social criticism, creativity and play. This holds promises as well as penalties. Whilst such a state of non-belonging creates anomie and isolation, at the same time it offers the elderly the chance to be innovative and to exploit the rolelessness. At such times they may justify the stereotypes of 'wily old man', 'old witch' or 'old crone' as exploiters of cultural freedom and confusion. But, as Myerhoff (1984:309) points out, these confused and incomplete areas of the cognitive map are not merely the unknowns, they are also the contingencies - invitations to culture making.

The main thrust of this section is to explore the way in which the elderly rehearse a means of 'belonging' through performance and ceremony, and, paradoxically, the means by which they sense their status of 'non-belonging' or liminality within the 'world at large'. The 'world at large' is not, however, simply the world of the 'not-yet-old' but includes the old themselves. Liminality has, as Myerhoff puts it, 'the complex advantage of leaving old people alone, to be themselves only more so' (1984:311). Thus they may be 'more themselves' both *among* themselves and in relation to others.

The Monday Lunch Club Christmas lunch

The following ethnography reveals performance ritual within ritual. It is centred around the celebration of Christmas which, as a ritual, with the emphasis on doing things just as they have always been done, gives to the participants access to their past and, thus, continuity, both individually and collectively.

The celebration of Christmas by the lunch club at Windsor Court was planned to be a grand affair. The Social Work Department had invited two day classes (the Monday and the Wednesday Classes) to come together for the day, to eat lunch. As the date had grown nearer the possibilities of and desires for the event itself had served as an inexhaustible topic of conversation among the women. By the beginning of December the somewhat dull and tawdry interior of the common room had been transformed with the hanging of the festive decorations.

On the day of the lunch the room was festooned with Christmas hangings, ribbons and a tree. There were a few cards pinned to the 'Arabian Nights' wall rug above the piano. Someone had placed a wooden box draped with straw on the sideboard. Inside the upturned box a number of plastic people and animals had been placed as a crude representation of the nativity scene. The folding tables had been placed head to tail up the centre of the room and white cloths draped over. There were candles with greenery and tinsel entwined at their bases, for centrepieces.

I worked alongside Angus and three wardens: Betty, Maureen and Shiona - who had previously worked at Windsor Court. We folded red napkins, laid the tables with twice the usual amount of cutlery and added sherry glasses. There were numerous donations of cheap chocolates, 'Quality Street' and 'Roses' selections, which we put out in bowls, dotted round the room. We pulled up the easy chairs, and placed cushions on the seats of chairs for those who would have difficulty reaching the table.

The weather was overcast and wet. Several hours too early Elsie, Mairi and Margaret - the only celebrants who were also residents of Windsor Court, were down in the common room. Everything was prepared. Responsibility for the preparation of the meal itself had been passed to a husband and wife team of outside caterers. Betty and Maureen were busy helping themselves to chocolates. "Weel, we like oor food," Maureen explained to me. "An' this time o' the year ye let yersel' go." She laughed.

Jimmy Arnot, who had been commissioned to provide the music and was himself in his eighties, arrived with his drum and percussion kit and hi fi. He set up at one corner of the room whilst Angus, the Community Care Assistant and I put out the gifts under the tree. Angus had been scrupulously fair. Except for himself, everyone would receive a gift comprising a box of three perfumed soaps, a box of chocolates and a box of shortbread. Each was labelled 'Elsie, from Santa,' and so on. By the time the gifts had been assembled in the corner the already mean little tree was dwarfed in size.

The twelve women from the two separate day classes arrived later than usual. That the day was set apart was clear from people's appearances: the women had made a special effort to dress for the event, holding perfectly preserved handbags from other decades, wearing symbolic jewellery - unmistakable and often expensive gifts from their deceased partners or children - announcements of connection, remembrance and esteem.

Margaret who had been sitting all this time with a large ASDA grocery bag full of Christmas cards under her chair, reached down and opened the bag.

"Ah dinna ken everyyin's name, so Ah've no' put their names on a' o' them," she commented as she leafed heavily though the envelopes. She drew one and handed it to me. I thanked her. The other women opened their cards, considered them and then carefully placed them in their handbags for later display in their homes.

The meal went smoothly and no unusual developments were evident. The wardens all sat together; the Monday club sat one end; the Wednesday club at the other. The first course, tinned grapefruit masquerading as Florida cocktail, was presented in small, stainless-steel dishes. We had already been served with sherry or lemonade. The next course was a bowl of soup accompanied with small, white wedges of sliced bread. The main course: steak pie or steak without the pie, potatoes, carrots and peas. By this time the sherry bottle had done a third round. Then it was a choice of ice-cream, apple pie or trifle - liberally small helpings, washed down with tea and cream and plain

biscuits, 'after-eights', then more chocolates. At their age, women felt that they could turn a blind eye to their weight. Most indulged in several chocolates each.

With the exception of Ella, a Wednesday Club participant who decided to sit with members of the Monday Club, the two classes neither sat together nor talked together for the whole of the day. It was clear that anything different was neither expected or required of them. The meal was eaten amid a hum of conversation with the occasional laugh or shriek from the warden's end of the table.

After lunch Angus asked me to help him with the games and the gift giving, asking me for advice on when I thought each should take place. I found myself as usual uncomfortably in the position of wanting to be more assertive, to show that I could adopt the hallmark of a good community care assistant - the bright, breezy and common-sense actor - and yet, at the same time, being unwilling to compromise my position as passive participant in the proceedings - a position which would undoubtedly leave me looking weak and ineffectual. I agreed to make up some questions so that one or two of the prizes could be won. There was not much conviction for a quiz, however, and only one woman decided to respond to my questions whilst the others sat unsmiling, passively looking on.

It seemed to me, at any rate, that the care assistants were attempting to accomplish 'mission impossible'. With darkness beginning to fall outside, even though it was only three o'clock, the heavy curtains were drawn across the windows, and the combination of gloom, full stomachs and prescribed medication began to take their toll. However, this was by no means total. From his position within the circle of women Angus looked round at them.

"Whit aboot hoo Christmas us'd tae be like?" he asked brightly, innocently entering dangerous ground. "Whit are the biggest differences between Christmas taeday an' Christmas twenty year ago?" he asked more precisely.

"Twenty year!" expostulated Ruby. "Fifty or sixty year mair like!"

"A'richt then," he replied, slightly embarrassed. "*Ye* decide. Fifty or sixty year," and he gestured with his hands, symbolically tossing the question back to Ruby.

"Weel, fur a start, we lived in different hooses. We'd a big family Christmas - but everyone there had big families an' lots o' neebors. We us'd tae hae guid cracks on the street corner. It wis a real rural community."

"Whit aboot Christmas presents, whit did ye us'd tae get?" asked Angus.

"Nocht'!" said Evelyn without reflection, then she reconsidered: 'though sometimes an apple an' a pear an' a three-penny piece."

"Ah got a doll," said Ella.

"Jest an apple an' a pear an' yin present frae Santa," said Kathy.

"If ye got a three-penny piece ye were rich," added Ruby.

Moulded by the generation in which he had grown up Angus saw Christmas as a time for gift-giving and, above all, as a children's feast. But in the Christmas the women had known in childhood there was, in general, nothing for or about children (Gillis, 1996:103). [1]

"It wisnae really Christmas which wis the special day but New Year." Ruby explained. "Everyin worked on Christmas Day. Ye had a chicken, mebbe, or jest a normal meal.

"But ye a'ways had steak pie on New Year's Day. Ye furst-footed wi steak pie an' had it fur dinner on New Year's Day. New Year's Day wis a'ways the holiday here. The Co-operative us'd tae take glass steak bowls frae different hames. Each bowl had the hooseholder's name on it an' then the store wid fill them wi steak an' a crust an' deliver them."

The presentation of the gifts

The giving of the presents was accompanied with a great deal of anticipation and good will. Angus had asked Rab to pretend to be Santa and, apart from giving out the gifts, his main task was to plant a kiss on the cheek of each woman. This was achieved by bending low over each, murmuring: "Happy Christmas", followed by the woman's name, into the neck of each one, with his body draped over each elderly shoulder and giving the air a kiss, in the great "Hello darling" theatrical art. Somehow, it worked.

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[1] That Christmas, according to Gillis (1996:103), was 'more about ageing and death, with its major symbol old Father Christmas, a figure bearing a close resemblance to grim Father Time. Children had their own saint, Nicholas, and their own special day, but it came early in December. Christmas did not become a day special to them until Saint Nick underwent a fictional makeover in Clement Clarke Moore's *The Night before Christmas*'. The publication of Moore's book in Britain was not until 1891 and the metamorphosis of Saint Nicholas to Santa Claus was itself in its infancy when these elders were children.

It looked as if each woman was being kissed (and in the case of the wardens, Rab was kissed, as they crudely pulled him round and planted a smacker on his cheek - to the others' raucous laughs) but the lack of any facial contact preserved the decorum of each.

The care managers who had responsibility for the day were aware of the perilous course they had set themselves in the provision of entertainment and it was important that the day continued apace with no unnecessary silences or impasse. The failure of the quiz to inspire the women propelled the day's activities onward. It was now the turn for another sort of game: 'pass the parcel'. The women brought their chairs into a complete circle and Angus brought across two parcels. This led to immediate difficulties for some of the woman as the parcels were to be circulated at the same time but in opposite directions. They certainly found it difficult to remove the paper and complained loudly. "As bad as openin' a packet o' biscuits", Kathy, at her turn, looked accusingly at Angus. Jimmy stopped the music at intervals and in the silence we watched in anticipation as fragile elderly hands tore at the paper. There was consternation when it appeared that Ruby, by coincidence, might win both wrapped gifts. She quickly returned the gift to Mairi, the previous player, to ensure equanimity. The contents revealed air freshener and a bottle of household cleaner.

After the games Jimmy's music took over the void. It was a little too loud for some, but Kathy enjoyed it, getting up at one point to waggle her stiff and thin body across the floor, singing along in time to the music. Betty the warden and I danced the Gay Gordon together. Rab sat glued to his chair with embarrassment, clearly hoping that no-one would ask him to dance, whilst Angus pretended to be unable to dance.

May's song

Later during the afternoon the women's thoughts turned towards song and it was suggested that we sing a Christmas carol. After some discussion the carol 'Away in a manger' was chosen. Without music and with May, from the Wednesday club, providing a starting point for notes, we gave a graceless and tuneless performance of the miracle of the birth.

There was further silence in the disappointing aftermath of the carol. Then, perhaps in response to this lacklustre performance, May, who was sitting beside me, suddenly broke into glorious song - her angelic voice soaring. The melody from the Burns song "Flow Gently Sweet Afton', emanating from Jimmy Arnot's hi fi, had inspired her.

> Flow gently, sweet Afton, among they green braes,
> Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise;
> My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream.
> Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream!
>
> How lofty, sweet Afton, they neighbouring hills,
> Far mark'd with the courses of clear, winding rills;
> There daily I wander as noon rises high,
> My flocks and my Mary's sweet cot in my eye.
>
> How pleasant thy banks and green vallies below,
> Where wild in the woodlands the primroses grow;
> There oft, as mild ev'ning weeps over the lea,
> They sweet-scented birk shades my Mary and me.
>
> Flow gently, sweet Afton, among they green braes,
> Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise;
> My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream.
> Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream!

We listened, transfixed. May's voice was clear and quite beautiful. For a moment she was transformed into a young girl. She *looked* transformed. Her posture, energy, movements and facial expressions lightened, quickened and signalled freedom. She took on what can only be described as an air of youthfulness and we could all see her, singing for the first time as a young girl at a Christmas celebration in her childhood home. On my other side Margaret covered her eyes with her hands as tears spread through her fingers down her cheeks. When May had finished singing Margaret removed her hands, looked about her as though surprised, smiled fully and wished everyone a "Happy Christmas".

Conjunctions between past and present

In my interpretation of this event I have drawn on Myerhoff's explanations emanating from her own fieldwork. I will begin, therefore, by suggesting that May's song, though a symbolic form, was not *about* anything else; it was not a secondary experience or an interpretation, but 'an original experience, immediate and satisfying in itself' (Myerhoff, 1984:326). Along with the circumstance in which the song had first been experienced, came the past, bringing 'unaltered fragments of prior time' (1984:326). This was timelessness and the past was made into the present. Adam Mendilow (1952) describes this process as occurring when the chemistry of thought is untouched by intervening events and the passage of time. Such moments are almost divine and carry with them 'their original, pristine associations and feelings' (Myerhoff, 1984:327). Heidegger (1975) reminds us that is the purpose of all art:

> [The sculpture] is not a portrait whose purpose is to make it easier to realise how the god looks; rather it is a work that lets the god himself be present and thus *is* the god himself.
>
> Heidegger, 1975:46-47

To paraphrase this, the purpose of May's song was not to make it easier to realise how the past looks; but rather to let the past itself be present and thus *to be* the past itself.

Marcel Proust's work examines how the past may sometimes be recaptured with all its original force, unmodified by intervening events. May's singing had produced a magical Proustian moment - a pinpoint of the greatest intensity, crystallising a lifetime of experience when the women experienced a sense of the past as never truly lost. In these few minutes the flood of childhood memories captured the self as it was originally so that each woman knew beyond doubt that she was still the same person as the child who yet dwelled within a time-altered body. At the same time the diffuseness of life was transcended, the sense of duration overcome and all of their selves and their memories were felt to be universally valid - achieving a sense of oneness with their past and among themselves.

Re-membering

Happiness in sorrow is paradoxical. May's singing recalled another time of the song. The correspondence between the two occasions inevitably opened the depths of time and for most of the women their memories probably only hustled together vague memories of the past. Yet the mere recollection, however vague, of former untroubled times, lifted them from the trials and grievances of the past year. It offered the opportunity not merely to recall the past but to relive it, in all its primary freshness unaltered by intervening changes and reflections. This was an act of what Myerhoff has referred to as re-membering (1984:320): hyphenating the word to distinguish it from ordinary recollection. For memory itself, she writes, 'is a continuum, ranging from vague, dim shadows to the brightest most vivid totality of an original experience' (1984:319). Re-membering is at one end of this spectrum. In its vivid totality it is purposeful, shaping the reaggregation of one's members - the figures who properly belong to one's life story, one's own prior self, all the significant others without which the story of oneself is left incomplete. This is in contrast to the passive, continuous, fragmentary flickerings of images and feelings that accompany other activities in the normal flow of consciousness and, alone, may lead one to believe that often what emerges from the memories of the older mind is a very thin gruel of former life-enriching experiences.

In order to convey the experience of memory *in the song* and to create the corresponding associative horizon for the other women - who, after all, did not share May's personal associations - it was the words of the song as well as the music that embodied the recollective experience. In generic words the poet Burns describes the

scene: the stream, the hills, the banks and braes, the woodlands and the valleys. The landscape that figured in the women's thoughts, as May sang, embodied the recollective experience conveyed in the poem. For a brief time, the disclosed depths of memory, which graced the moment by the stream, were gathered visually before their eyes. Everything about the song drew the participants, as Heidegger observes, into its 'riff' (1975:35). 'In the vicinity of the work we are suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be' (1975:35). For the participants, this 'somewhere else' was not a spatial elsewhere, in the sense that the mind thinks of being elsewhere, but in the sense that what was being sung offered a different experience of the *here and now* (States, 1985:4). The song was a place, not of reference, but of disclosure. What was disclosed could not be found elsewhere because it did not exist outside the transitory moment of the song.

Towards three o'clock it was time to depart. The women began sneaking looks through breaks in the curtains of the common room to see if they could glimpse the bus that would return them home. When it finally pulled up outside the door, they began to struggle to their feet, pulled their coats around, shook hands or kissed good-bye and were helped out to the waiting bus. There went Annie, wobbling a little more than usual; then Ella, silently frustrated by her handicap but encouraged by the *bon homie* of the afternoon and more willing than usual to accept assistance. Hearty and firm good-byes were spoken to the smiling and ruddy lady, Margaret, from the Wednesday club: she who had tried so hard to enjoy herself and seemed to have done so. The door was difficult to move against the force of the wind. They moved slowly towards the door. The woman with the angel's voice had been transformed back into 'elderly woman'. Her song had been an unexpected offering - but a short brightness quickly cached. She looked at no-one as she left and her worn coat hung dully across her thin shoulders as she went out into the cold evening and the heavy door swung shut behind.

The emergence of selfhood and collective identity

Ritual provides public occasions for re-membering (Myerhoff, 1984:320). It creates a setting in which 'desire and interpretation may *appear*, to participants and an audience'. (Myerhoff, 1984:320, emphasis in original). For old people in particular, performance ritual allows them to present claims regarding their vanished past and proof of their continuing existence. It has the capacity for releasing stored experiences or, at the very least, altering the composure of identity (States, 1985:159).

Conceivably, Myerhoff (1984:327) eloquently argues, any kind of ritual has the capacity to retrieve a fragment of past life, but those associated with and originating in childhood are more likely to do so - as they carry opportunities to provide personal and historical continuity. In this performance ritual the women were able to see themselves at earlier periods of their lives, and the world in which those earlier experiences took place. This was a privileged experience. Integration through memory with earlier states of being provided for them the sense of continuity and completeness that may be counted as an essential developmental task of old age.

During the Christmas lunch two distinct but related kinds of continuity were provided: the individual's sense of unity as a single person (individual/biological continuity) and the sense of being 'one people' (collective/historical continuity). Personal continuity is something that is not automatically given by experience. It must be achieved. The sense of being the same person over time, despite great change, and sharp disruption in social and cultural experience does not happen easily or inevitably. For this personal coherence, this sense of psychological integration to take place, the individual must be capable of finding and reliving familiar parts of her history. And often, the most important, charged pieces of personal history come up from the remote past, from the numinous events and experiences of early childhood. May's song, "Flow gently, sweet Afton", in its symbolic entirety, was replete with layered meanings, so that different ones were available to the different participants. The women's emotional response to this indigenous song was powerful and instantaneous. It had first emerged during their childhoods - sung by their mothers before them - and its characteristics of the parochial and the sentimental - the very kailyard of which all renascent Scots must be intolerant - did not in the least diminish its power. In contrast, the Christmas carol was received with less interest; it had come to their attention too late and was unattached to earlier parts of themselves. To be sure, it could provide aesthetic satisfaction, but never arouse the flood of nostalgia, the original emotions, the sense of being one with one's memories contributed by the childhood song.

The gift of the doll with the lilac petticoats

The second ethnographic experience, in which the amplification of feeling and meaning was particularly evident, took place some weeks later. Warm sunshine was beginning to herald the onset of Spring after a particularly cold week in early March. I arrived at Windsor Court for the Tuesday coffee morning. The gathering was more sparsely attended than usual. I sat down beside Mrs Stuart and we chatted about the

holiday weekend that had just passed. Despite the fact that this had had little bearing on the lives of residents, other than that some familiar activities ceased for the period, the women marked these days as though they were still involved in them.

Margaret wended her way cautiously between the chairs. I remarked that she was looking very colourful in a flowered blouse and skirt.

"Weel, Ah'm nae feelin' tae colourfu'." She looked at me quizzically. "Ah've a stiff back frae sittin' in that chair, in a cauld draft yesterday." And she pointed with one of her sticks towards the suspect chair. "Ah'm nae sittin' there again!"

A gentle hum of conversation established itself. Some minutes later the raffle was called. Linda asked me to read the winning number. Elsie was the winner.

"Ye're very fortunate, Mrs Hutchinson," said Mrs Lowe. "Ye've a winnin' streak!

"She's won this raffle mair times than Ah can remember," Mrs Lowe, complained in an aside to me. But it was not a bitter complaint. Elsie was well-liked. She whole-heartedly endorsed life at Windsor Court, attending every function going. Her caution that it was important to be on good terms with everyone helped maintain her standing among the women.

There were gasps and smiles of pleasure as the prize was delivered to the winner. It was a doll with blond tresses and a long lilac crocheted suit, with layers of crocheted, frilled petticoats, beautifully and intricately made, and a matching jacket. The women were all in agreement about the beauty of the doll and the skill with which it had been made.

"Pass her roon!" they called. "So we can a' hae a cuddle!"

They handled and examined the doll with the curiosity of young girls and the experience of judges at a competition for craft-work, being simultaneously impressed and innocently delighted.

"Ah've ne'er had a doll tae cuddle," Elsie confessed to me. "Ma parents could ne'er afford tae gie me yin."

"Neither had Ah," agreed her neighbour, and the two women struck up a conversation about the poverty of their childhood years.

It seemed somehow strangely ironic that, at the age of 92, Elsie had finally been delivered what appeared to be now such a relatively modest childhood wish.

The significance of the doll with the lilac petticoats

Later that day I spent some time thinking about the women's responses to the doll that had been presented to Elsie that morning. I felt a pressing need to tighten my grasp on some embryonic answers to a series of questions circling my mind, before they were lost in the next day's concerns. I considered the doll. It was not a gift that I found particularly attractive or desirable. It was a gift associated with childhood and, at first glance, reminded me of other acts closely related to childhood, like the Christmas party game of 'pass-the-parcel', described earlier. But, unlike the well-meaning party game, which was symptomatic of the more damaging and embedded set of practices known as infantilization and documented in Hazan's (1980:31) account of a London day centre for elderly Jewish people, the transformatory power of the doll as metaphor seemed to image old age and childhood as parallel social categories rather than make one become the other (Hockey and James, 1995:136).

In some ways I felt pity towards the women's responses; mostly I felt indifferent. I couldn't help feeling that I must be particularly undiscerning and lack the ability to appreciate the small things in life. Not wishing to believe either of these of myself, however, I sought other reasons to expedite my own feelings.

Perhaps I was not able to relate to this incident because I saw too little to relate to: I was estranged. Perhaps my own sentiments related to the insights delivered by Woodward (1995:90) and touched on in chapter 13. Perhaps it was a vain enterprise on my part to expect the feelings of these elderly women to be mirrored at my age. The opposite of being estranged is to find the life of a people believable, to recognize oneself in them, to imagine oneself doing what they do. In this encounter across the cultural and age boundary my mind seemed to freeze.

Waiting many years for the object of one's desire, went some way to explaining the women's delight in what they saw in the doll. Before arthritis swelled their fingers, and cataracts dimmed their eyesight, many of the women at Windsor Court and Phillip House were equally able, which is why they could so appreciate the skill evident in the clothing of the doll with the lilac petticoats. But these reasons alone were not sufficient.

It was not until a few weeks later, when reflecting on this particular event, that I began to reinterpret the significance of this discourse, approaching it in the context of the narrative of shifting deprivation: the progressive loss of 'accessibility' both in a tangible, physical sense and in a social sense being pivotal to this. Engagement with

deprivation, both past and present, had never been entirely passive but had involved creative attempts to build hope and to access the happiness of life. This required access to possibilities, for these women were still very much individuals who wanted to live creative and satisfying lives within the security of the formal caring culture of today. Yet the sort of access to possibilities with which younger generations were now familiar was simply not available to those who felt so acutely their social and physical distance from the trappings of modernity. There was no doubt this was a harsh deprivation, for old age was not an emancipation from desire: it failed them in so much as it failed to provide a future-oriented existence. Surely this was one of the reasons why the place of remembering among the old and the build-up to events such as the 'day-oot' or Christmas, were empowered with such ceremonial significance.

Neither was there just one kind of desire. The world of experience of these women was mapped at every point, particularly closely at the great nodes, into the 'desire to stay where they were' as against the 'desire to press forward'. Blythe (1979:41) refers to these as two distinct categories of human life although, throughout my study, the women presented fronts that suggested they saw no contradiction in struggling to achieve both elements of the dualism. For the loss of personal mobility and loss of 'accessibility' to the fruits of the 'great modern world' had far-reaching implications. Significantly, perhaps, it had the strange and contradictory consequence of making the women look upon themselves as already belonging to the past. This insight was suggested by Jouhandeau in the claim that 'everything, even the present, takes on the appearance of something recalled' (quoted in de Beauvoir, 1970).

Yet it was still a past from which they felt themselves dislocated. All they once possessed had been either lost or altered. Former villages were scenes of demolition and renewal; the brightness and energetic spread of new housing making them feel foreigners in their own country. 'Looking around', writes Blyth of an elderly man, 'he can't believe his eyes. In a way, he hasn't needed to move because his surroundings themselves have passed through such a transition that it frequently strikes him that he isn't where he was anyway' (1979:49). It was not the past that had become 'a foreign country' (Lowenthal, 1985) but the present. No wonder these people felt in limbo - betwixt and between. With a large part of themselves, they were simply 'not there'. They were living elsewhere, living intuitively, habitually, verbally, drawing on myth, aphorism and ritual. In this way they were saved from acknowledging the immediate and difficult truths of their present circumstances.

Through means of *intensifying* the present by embodying within it the past, I suspected that the women removed themselves from the hard dimension of *living in* the present. They did not really have to work hard to piece together the fragments of the past or spend time reshaping the imaginary possibilities of their future, however vulnerable. For everything was recalled: these women now lived at a time which was the meeting point between their past's future and their future's past. It was no more or less than that. Even the Proustian moment described previously, although a moment of the present, emerged as something recalled. This did not have to be seen as loss: there was an opposite perception emerging within this sense of perpetuity, made possible at random times such as the presentation of this particular raffle prize. Not merely because it did not match the pedestrian nature of other prizes, such as a can of air freshener or a bar of chocolate, but because it evoked something more complex and more powerful, unifying each women with herself as a child. Thus, the banality of the present slipped out of view as it took on the 'appearance of something recalled'. Yet, at the same time, the experience nourished the women by enabling them to still see through the inexorable march of progress and, by unconsciously seeking timelessness, escaping time, dwelling, albeit temporarily, in the eternal. Myerhoff has described these events as 'rare moments of personal integration' which 'may happen when early memories stored in the body are triggered by the enactment of ancient long-known ethnic ritual gestures' (1979:256).

It was odd. One would not think that a lilac-petticoated doll could evoke such profound implications for humanity.

Intensifying the present

Throughout my time at Windsor Court I was struck by the way in which many of the residents appeared able to intensify the present - the trivial and mundane acts of life - to render them matters of importance, and their ability to deepen satisfaction in small rewards and pleasures. The interest and pleasure shown over quite trivial amounts of money or items offered for raffle seemed to articulate this. Each of these women had a capacity for refining the raw shape her life had inherited into a personal pattern. Each made something of the parts of their lives that they knew they could not change, so that the drab and irksome corners of the day heightened rather than stultified their leisure time.

This re-emerging originality - their culture of creativity - to which the rest of society appeared blind, was part of the personal evolution of the residents, founded on social

detachment, long experience and the understanding of a shortened future. They thus found themselves at odds with the convergent thinker and received opinion - their children's, officials from institutional departments, well-meaning carers. For in interpreting and considering what they did and said, and why, it was their creativity that fashioned anew what I had at first observed casually but now saw in a new light. Their creativity manifested itself in apparent spontaneity. Above all it was never complacent. Its natural allies were instincts and perceptions which would proclaim a vision others had not seen before. It produced for me so vivid a revelation that what had seemed pedestrian took on new dimensions that perhaps I would not previously believed could exist.

The incident with the doll reflected a broader picture. I recalled my experiences at meetings of Dunfermline Elderly Forum and a meeting with an officer at the District Council. At both meetings I had come away with the sense of being among or discussing desocialized people: people who were considered to be or thought they were dispensable; their conduct a matter of little importance and their controls a matter of diminished importance; people replete with personal and social resources that had yet to be mined or appreciated. If these people considered themselves to be unwanted and if they felt bruised, perhaps their struggle to make the most of the smallest things in life was a small way of repudiating their own condition. Drawing on their cultural background, they elevated mundane affairs, bringing to the moment a heightened consciousness that 'rendered suffering and scarcity explicable, and because explicable, bearable' (Myerhoff, 1979:218). For individuals in their circumstances, for whom life had never been easy, and where the hours of their days and the days of their weeks were now spent asserting their independence against the intolerable social and physiological restraints of old age, nothing was impersonal. Every minute of every hour was vital to them. Small challenges were turned into triumphs and small pleasures became celebrations of life. A bunch of flowers restored faith in humanity; a 'day oot' to the shops was a Mediterranean cruise. Only self-existence was a certainty. Such common-place events, writ so small in other people's lives, became enormous in theirs. The activities of these residents, like our own, swelled to fit the frames in which they occurred. To those inside, they were always complete and consuming.

Concluding comments

As a witness at meetings of the elderly many opportunities presented themselves where I observed that the hold that society had over the life of older people, who have less

to lose with each passing day, diminished with time. Ritual provided the safeguard wherein participants could perform their thoughts and where the moral order was seen from a new perspective. It was an active agent of change precisely because it altered the consciousness of its members. There was an enormously symbolic message here for the emergence of culture at Windsor Court and Phillip House. Both places provided models of alternative life styles built on different values to those commonly esteemed. Markers of success like wealth, power, physical beauty, youth, mobility, security and social status were irrelevant to the progress of their lives. The women had devised a counterworld - their own version of 'the good life' - meaning, intensity, consciousness - a nearly invisible world, but nonetheless of great significance for wider society.

Alongside good health, resilience, imagination, courage and a childhood passed in a society that treasured its children, Myerhoff (1979:218) marks the heightened awareness of all aspects of life as an important ingredient among those attributes which help people to age well. For the individuals in this study it was probably *the* most important aspect, given that, in old age, good health had escaped most of them and, as chapter 5 suggests, liminality, invisibility and social irrelevance underwrote their childhood memories.

The doll with the lilac petticoats served as a mnemonic for me, reminding me that however difficult and tedious were the lives of the women at Windsor Court, they were embued with a deep capability to embrace life - producing at times an intensity of pleasure which allowed escape beyond its confines.

> i who have died am alive again today,
> and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
> day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay
> great happening illimitably earth.[2]

It was a revelation that I found immensely humbling.

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[2] e.e. Cummings

Chapter 12

Construction and reconstruction of self through autobiography:

The Thornton railwaymen's oral history group

Introduction

It is possible to view the performance rituals, documented in earlier chapters, not simply as a social resource but, as Bryan (1995) has also argued, a resource in a cultural process. The participants were carriers of that culture and they transmitted it, often in a disorderly fashion, but more or less successfully nonetheless. The achievements of the units of the group, the participants, were inextricably linked to the achievements of the group itself.

I have suggested that rituals perform an ambiguous task in the establishment of meanings of selfhood and identity. Whilst some - the Phillip House residence meeting, the meetings of Dunfermline Elderly Forum, arguably the lunch club and the coffee morning at Windsor Court - were 'business', co-ordinated and formal, yet they could not stifle the often rebellious self-consciousness of its members. In this chapter I seek to explore the significance of self-consciousness and the development of selfhood within the public occasion of the railwaymen's oral history group. My intention is to contrast this with my interpretation of the ethnography of the women's group in the next chapter.

The following ethnography reveals both what was recounted within the group and something of the way in which it was recounted. Among the railwaymen the past was reworked not simply through the practice of remembering, but through the act of attendance and in the way the meeting itself was conducted. The symbolic structure of the meeting provided for different meanings to be made available to different participants yet, at the same time, the particular form of communication taking place clearly linked past with present therefore providing both individual and social continuity.

Introduction to the railwaymen's oral history group

During the summer of 1994 I was introduced by the company Scotspeak[1] to the members of a railwaymen's oral history group that took place fortnightly in the spartan surroundings of the pensioners' recreation hut at Thornton, a central meeting place between east and west Fife. Thereafter I drove there every two weeks to join them to listen to stories about their years on the railway.

Known as 'Thornton Railwaymen's Group' - and constituting about 20 men - they met regularly to record their working pasts, collecting reminiscences about life on the railways and preserving them on tape for posterity.

Freed from the claustrophobic atmosphere of the sheltered homes I sensed entry into an exciting exploratory phase of study. The very ambience of the meetings was different. There was no silence; no unease. Conversation unfurled freely in the protection of their common foundation: life on the railways. Thoughts of the tape recorder on the table were quickly swept aside in the flood of memories.

I was fascinated by the idea of groups of people from one industrial background meeting together in this way. I had never met anyone before who had spent so long in one line of employment; in the group I was confronted by individuals, few of whom had worked for less than 50 years 'on the railway'. Here together sat train drivers, signalmen, firemen, guards and porters, along with maintenance and clerical staff. Their work environment had been not merely one aspect of their culture but a whole cultural milieu pervading all the domains of social life. They were, as I reveal, railwaymen first and Fifers second. These men had worked for decades on the main railway uniting Fife to the rest of mainland Scotland. They were all long past retirement. They used their group sessions to describe to each other their past lives, to share their stories and to embrace common memories. It was as though, for short times, a door opened in the wall separating them from their past and they walked through into the garden of their collective history. The meetings punctuated existence and transformed it from mere existence, bringing to the here and now the realities of what once had been.

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[1] Scotspeak, has established, in Fife, Scotland's first centre for the recording, promoting and safe-keeping of Scottish oral history.

The relevance of the work-based identity

I have shown that the past and the present may be difficult to see as a continuum with consequent impact on cultural identity. For the railwaymen, however, assistance in building their culture was provided by a number of important continuities that, like the railway, symbolised territorial identity, interdependence and connectivity linking them to themselves over time and despite many changes. Here was a symbolic marriage between territory, men and power. The threads woven through their lives were their continuing passions for the railway and for learning and progressing, all imbued with a symbolic undertone. Their previous employment had eclipsed self consciousness about their identity. Now in old age, they sought that identity of the past, using reminiscence as a tool to promote interest and engagement. Apparently entering a different world as they entered into story-telling and reminiscing of the past. They provoked the traditional role of the older person as 'story-teller' (Coleman, 1993b: 106; Dunne, 1979), a preserver of memories.

The ethnography draws attention to the work-based identity that informed all the dimensions of their lives. Salaman's (1974: 20) definition of a 'true' occupational community being one where the common work experiences are crucial in determining a sense of group membership and identity, seemed particularly relevant. What was striking was the extent to which the oral history group was enacted as a present-day representation of the community of the past. During my attendance, an enormous amount of social and historical information was provided to which it is impossible to do justice. At the same time I realised, as an outsider, that a highly restricted internal cultural code - which was largely incomprehensible to me - existed, and, at least for the duration of my field work, ensured that I would remain an outsider.

In the first excerpt, noted down during my third visit to the group, I describe the introduction to the group of a new member. New members were always invited to give a brief description of why they went to work on the railways and what they remembered as particularly significant dimensions of their working life. This particular introduction also illuminates the practice of naming which, as I will show, had been an extremely significant ritual means of initiating the men into an identity.

Railway symbolism

Hugh, the group's elected chairman, was seated at the front of the room, facing a small wooden table, on which was perched the microphone and tape recorder. Bowing out from the front, a tight circle of straight-backed metal chairs was fully occupied by the other men, Sunday-smart in ties and sweaters, their trousers carefully creased.

"Can Ah introduce a new member here taeday," Hugh began. "Nae new tae us but he's a new member tae oor class. Bin interested in railways. Us'd tae be on the railway at yin time. We us'd tae know him as Lantern Jaws."

The room erupted with laughter and Hugh continued with a twinkle in his eye: "an Ah dinna ken whither he's e'er lost that," he chuckled. "But welcome anyway!" The new member nodded cordially.

"Whit gave ye the inclination tae come tae the railway, Bob?" asked Hugh.

"Ah'll tell ye whit brocht me tae the railway straight enough," replied Bob. "Ma faither - when Ah wis young, said tae me 'there's yin job yer nae gaun tae dae. Yer nae gaun on doon the pit, see?

"An Ah wis still jest fowerteen - Ah wis a message boy by then - Ah wis workin' in a shoemaker's shop. 'Ah'd rather see ye on the railway than in a black hole diggin' coal', he says. So that's the reason Ah went tae the railway." Hugh nodded with recognition of shared experience.

"In those days ye ken there were quite a lot o' boys joinin' the railway." He paused. "Yer talkin' aboot boys noo. Durin' the War they were wantin' young boys tae come because they were runnin' sae many trains. Between ye an' me, there were sae many gettin' enrolled that there wis a constant intake. In some weeks there wis twenty or thirty boys."

Bob launched into a brief resume of his career. "Ah started as a cleaner. Then in charge o' a locomotive. Then promoted ye tae fireman. As time went on ye became a driver. Ye learned tae drive whilst a fireman - a' aspects o' drivin' an' the rules, ken. It took fifteen tae twenty years frae cleaner tae driver - dependin' on promotion. Apprenticeship wis aboot twenty year."

Symbolism regarding the nature of their former railway work informed the representation of the features of the railway community. The trains played a part in the rituals which symbolised the represented and celebrated features of community. Hours were long and arduous (5 am to midnight); time-keeping expected to be punctilious; and management policy never to be questioned. "The Railway Company were so strict aboot lost time on some trains, that e'en the drivers shuddered at the thocht o' bein' behind schedule," said Harry, one of the participants. The trains were imbued with a symbolic load. The keen requirement to be on time seemed somehow associated with the unpredictability of events - illness, death, financial hardship - that may work against this.

Like the miners the railwaymen shared a profound comprehension of the huge power of camaraderie. Within both occupational groups there was competitiveness: strength and antagonism working ambiguously. As in the mines, co-operation and mutual responsibility on the railways were essential to reduce potential threats and risk. There was association through a common suspension between life and death.

There was also an interdependence between the two industries. Both rail and coal were forms of energy, to enable progress. Crucial to the development of mining was the development of the railway. Thornton Junction, built over coal deposits and once known as 'Fife's Railway Town' - before it became overshadowed by the nearby new town of Glenrothes - became a vital part of the east coast railway network. Where there were coal mines the railways went, carrying coal to the seaports of Methil and Burntisland. Where there was a need for power, for the trains themselves and with the development of power technology in manufacturing industry during the first part of this century, the need was fuelled by coal from local pits.

Perhaps of greater significance, however, was the shared cultural heritage of a social environment that brought adversity and thus encouraged solidarity. Always in the presence of the men there was a quality of bonhomie, humour, honesty and integrity. But, like that ambience of the miners, it was also hardened by a representation of community as autonomous, enforcing militant solidarity and enabling survival through often long, difficult periods of the working life. This was articulated in chapter 5 and Harry expressed it in the following way. "Because o' the degree o' deprivation, particularly minin', there wis a great degree o' unity amongst the boys that wis employed - particularly in the minin' industry an' o' course within the

railway industry as well. There wis a particularly strong interest in the trade unions - associations of men."

Nicknames

Hugh's reference to Bob's nickname, above, was a reference to an identity of the past. The present was not a suitable time or environment for the practice of nicknames; the past, however, was unthinkable without. Because of their significance as a once-used ritual means of initiating the person into an identity, I explore their use in more depth here.

In a parallel way to the practice of renaming at Windsor Court (chapter 8) renaming, for the railwaymen, had been a major symbolic practice through which their social identity was discursively asserted in the context of an antagonistic social environment.

Naming, as Lévi-Strauss points out, is a mode of classification, important because classification is a necessary condition of possession (1966). Cohen draws attention to another point: that, in following this logic, although naming is required to make a person a member, 'it does not often confer *full* membership: that remains a task for future rites of initiation. Rather it confers socialness' (1993: 57).

The meanings the men imputed to their previous nicknames were as symbols or icons of themselves, conferring an identity or reputation on individuals. Yet, in the environment of the oral history group, these nicknames had been abandoned and the men, although they had known and worked alongside each other for decades, were thus unable to use them, as Tsimouris has written, as: 'devices of oral representation animating memories and emotions' (1995:1). They did not therefore, at least for now, assume 'central importance in the construction of a collective sense of belonging' (1995:1).

Nicknames, broadly understood are a particular form of identification discursively formulated and having sometimes a derogatory significance. Associated with the past the railwaymen's nicknames were outstanding markers of boundaries - articulating concerns of the present. They included 'Lantern Jaws'; 'The Professor'; 'Hitler'; 'Mantovani'; 'The Barrel'; 'The Monkey Wrench'; 'Maternity Will'; 'The Ranter'; 'Toffee Bob'; 'The Undertaker'; 'The Swank'; 'Hurricane'; and 'Birdie Johnson'. Although all these names were symbolic, referring to 'real things' for which they

'stood' yet it was not possible to assign meaning to them unambiguously. The names had complex and multiple referents. Furthermore, although nick naming had a sociological significance, there was another aspect: the meanings which naming had to the individuals concerned.

The names were all different; more different than their personal names. They clearly emphasised individuality; yet at the same time they were a means of placing the individual within the social matrix.

I sought translations for these nick-names. Deciphering their meanings entailed their exploration in the frame of local lived history. Nicknames drew upon a shared pool of historical knowledge and they operated as key metaphors, a local knowledge *par excellence* bearing associative, revealing significance. "Why The Professor'"?, I asked; "Because he a'ways says 'Ma faither said Ah didnae profess tae ken that!'" was the reply. In a similar way, 'The barrel' because the recipient of the nickname was 'big'; 'Mantovani' because of an individual's arm movements; 'Maternity Will' because "when a man's wife had a bairn ye got money frae the fund an' so he wis ayeways askin' if yer wife wis pregnant". 'Hitler' because the individual "had a wee moustache and a scowl on his face a' the time. He wisna weel an' took it oot on his mates."

The perception and the use of names was shaped by work notions and understandings framed by the railway tradition. 'The Monkey Wrench' was "that twisted he wis ca'd the monkey wrench", whilst 'Lantern Jaws' had 'a long, thin face'; 'the mother of Toffee Bob' owned a sweetie shop; and 'The Swank' was always beautifully turned out. Thomas Thomson earned the nickname 'Hurricane' and the story about how he acquired this name was related to me in the following way.

"Thomas wis at the throttle o' 'The Beattie Express'. This wis a nicht train, which thundered frae Glasgow tae Dundee, via Thornton, transportin' bread, scones an' cakes frae Beatties bakeries in Glasgow tae the east coast. Like the fish trains, the trains carrying Beattie's foodstuffs were priority vehicles. Woe betide the signalman who held up this train. The poor man wid be writin' reports fur a fortnicht tryin' tae explain why he'd held up e'en a minute the Beattie Express.

"But wan nicht Beattie's Express drew intae Thornton several minutes behind schedule. The driver, very worried, asked Thomas, who wis takin' ower as relief driver, tae make up lost time on the final run to Dundee. An' he did! When the train

passed through Cupar, the signal man got on the 'phone and asked the signalman at Leuchars to keep the main line open.

"'There's somethin' like a hurricane jest passed me' were his words. An' frae that very nicht Thomas Thomson was known as 'Hurricane Thomson'."

Clearly, these names revealed an aspect of a man's identity from the perspective of others. From a local point of view the giving of nicknames constituted symbolic markers demarcating a threshold, a beginning. Establishing the names, however, signified a beginning first and foremost for the givers rather than the recipients.

Within the group, the men would give insights about the nicknames attached to other's; never about their own. Although nicknames were important as key symbols in social interaction their embodiment in the flow of everyday action generated an enormous variety of meanings and emotions. They were symbols of communication with multiple functions enabling all the railwaymen to become involved. Since, however, the names seemed, for the most part derogatory, sometimes abusive, one of the primary functions of the ritual seemed to be a levelling function "tae keep them frae gettin' above their station" as Hugh put it. In the context of Fife railwaymen, nicknames displaced official names and dealt with the identity and reputation of the named. Yet it was not individual identities which were most at stake through these practices but the social identity of the men, taking into account their location in the social field of power relations. As a means of differentiating between the social groups that were co-existing within the framework of Fifers, nicknames were brought into use to symbolise an even more significant cultural domain than that of ethnicity (being a Fifer) - that is, being a railwayman.

Comedy and the purpose of anti-structure

Attention was drawn in chapter 9 to the development of communitas among elderly peers, assisted by the formation of an anti-structure with its own counter-authority. In part the meetings of the railwaymen served as definitional ceremonies: that is, *vide* Myerhoff (1979:185) performances of identity - contrived situations that allowed people to reiterate their collective and personal identities. They defined and accentuated the otherwise relative normlessness of the latter part of the life cycle. Sometimes they aroused great emotion and energy and this in turn was directed towards deeper symbols and more stable shared norms. Sometimes they generated internal disputes and arguments which were cathartic - but without much change in people's

circumstances. Myerhoff argues that part of the purpose of such ceremonies is to allow things to stay the same and 'to allow people to discover this sameness' (1979:185) and, in so doing, to act as a safety valve when there is any threat that the group will split apart. She also suggests that such ceremonies are often 'crystallized around an innocent outsider' (1979:186). In the case of the railwaymen, the 'innocent outsider' was, in the first excerpt below, Valda, the facilitator; and, in the second, myself.

Excerpt 1

Valda, Director of Scotspeak, had organised a 'day outing' for the men to a place of their choice. She drew the microphone over to her side of the table.

"Well, gentlemen" she began. "I have been in touch Mr Dewar at Springburn Museum in Glasgow, about our proposed trip, and he has said that he would be delighted to host you." She paused. "I said it would be a group of more or less elderly gentlemen..." Guffaws interrupted her. "...and that we needed our comfort stops - we need a few stops for a few rests."

"Let's go the whole hog", said Hugh, interrupting with reference to the range of activities on offer that day. The others all agreed. "We'll meet at hauf echt".

"Well, I don't know about you," Valda continued, undisturbed by these efforts to derail her line of conversation. "I certainly need a bit of a rest in the afternoon, don't you? A cup of tea?"

Hugh, grasping the opportunity to get his own back, retorted. "Weel, Ah mean, ye're gettin' on in years as well ye ken!"

"I know!" Laughter rippled through again and Hugh continued his line of attack. "We're a' as bad as ye. Ye should jest say it! Yer as weel sayin' it! and the laughter continued.

"That's cheeky!" replied Valda.

"Who's interested in gaun on this trip? That's the thing we hae tae find oot furst," said Hugh. "It's a day oot fur the class. If it's anythin' tae gae by the York trip wis excellent," he encouraged.

"Och aye, och aye," grunted Davie.

"Everythin' was laid on an' it wis really furst class." Having engaged humour at Valda's expense it was now important to reaffirm their appreciation of their facilitator. "An' Valda stuck her neck oot an' got us sorted oot, but she did make a guid job o' it. It was really enjoyable an' Ah think a lot o' fowk on the ither side o' the table enjoyed it as weel, because", Hugh eyed a man sitting across from him. "Edd! Ye were pretty guid wi yer instructions as far as instructin' little auld ladies struttin' aboot!"

"Whit aboot a date?" Harry interrupted. "We'll jest set a date the noo. Get it finished. Get it sorted oot. Ah mean, the langer we hang on the further it's gettin' intae the winter,"

"Aye, it's Christmas an' New Year tae", said Davie.

"Aye. So Ah think we should jest set a date," Hugh concurred.

Harry interrupted brusquely "Christ! Get on wi it! We need tae get this a' fixed up noo!"

"Well, Ah'm oot fur the tenth an' the fifteenth o' November" said Ron, one of the train drivers.

Quick as a flash, Bill, a signalman, responded. "Weel, that's when we're gaun then!" Laughter descended and Hugh waited a few minutes for the room to resume quiet.

"Ah think we thocht aboot a Thursday, then, didn't we?" he asked before turning to me.

"Ah'm includin' ye in this, Jenny, if ye want tae gae like - if yer man...if yer husband will let ye gae wi a group o' strange men, like. Yer safe enough, like. Ah think ye safe enough! It'll be a wee bit o' experience fur ye - in mair ways than yin!" Laughter broke out again.

Excerpt 2

In the following brief excerpt I was in the middle of asking for some background information to help me understand why some men became signal men whilst others became train-drivers. Before I could complete the question I was interrupted by Ron, a former driver.

"Weel" he quipped in rapid response to my request for information on signal men. "Ye had tae be able tae read an' write". There was a second's silence then an explosion of laughter.

"Aye", Bill retorted. Then with a caustic reference to the drivers. "But if the railway hadnae employed these men, there's nae yin employer in Scotland widhae taken them on." The laughter continued unabated. By now, Harry's eyes were streaming and he was choking with laughter. "Och Christ, Ah canna begin!" he gasped through his mirth. "Hod on!" Eventually he regained his composure.

At these meetings the men expressed their sentiments to each other in terms of an intricate code, consciously and unconsciously manipulated by the others. My own attempts to seek citizenship within this group were filled with lapses of insight. The code was a verbal and non-verbal vocabulary - sometimes including gestures and sometimes expressed extremely subtly so that it was only recognised by those who had learned its code. A grin, a shrug, a nod, a frown was a major event. Laughter, repartee, ridicule, insults, banter, and various forms of innuendo were among the many communications employed that regulated conduct.

At these meetings, emotions served the same functions as politics and law in larger societies. Myerhoff has written that, in intimate groups, 'sentiments alone may maintain group solidarity, control deviance, contain quarrels, mete out justice, and enforce and define the fundamental moral principles that make a collectivity a culture' (1979: 163). As they had done in their previous working lives, the men made themselves accountable not only for their behaviour but for their sentiments. The lack of differentiation between the moral order and the political order meant that the bulk of the work of social control was through emotions, both expressed and unexpressed.

Group reminiscing

Social control and the expression of sentiments at the meetings rehearsed the spirit of communitas between the men and, with the opportunity to present themselves, the opportunity to confer socialness. Besides this, there was yet another means by which the railwaymen conferred socialness among themselves, and this was through the social memory (Turner, 1995: 251). These collective memories were not simply images of the past; they represented the 'attitude of the group' of men, insofar as they defined its nature, qualities and weaknesses (Halbwachs, 1992: 59). The men stimulated one another's memories; they validated their accomplishments, their

values, and their images so that the shared history emerging could be approved. This quest limited the intrusion of any private suffering and failure. The pictures of past life were inevitably positive; failure and disappointments rarely featured, if at all. On the one hand it seemed that there was a need to create personal and collective myths, saying that it had indeed been all worth while. On the other, perhaps the underlying need for continuity was most easily realised in keeping at bay the tensions between the life that these men had lived and the life that they now sought to live by.

Often, discussions about past life on the railways were not particularly orderly; generally, the topics were loose and wide-ranging; and exchanges permitted to drift off on tangents. The fact that the men sought the unfamiliar props of the oral history group for their identity implied their marginal situations in the anterooms of life (Musgrove, 1977: 6). Emile Durkheim's sociology of religion dealt with the social bases of the sacred and the profane: the home and origin of the sacred was the 'effervescent', non-routine and marginal phase of social life (Durkheim, 1971). Woven through the sacred nature of the railwaymen's gathering were the often profane excursions into daily and trivial matters, criss-crossed by swift, funny and cutting interchanges among them. The following series of exchanges were entirely typical.

The flotsam and jetsam of history

Harry, whose voice was always heard at meetings of the group, was a Councillor and had been a group member since its inauguration. His father had worked on the railway from 1919 to 1946 and his brother was a railway driver. Harry joined the railway in 1935 and became an engine driver in 1948, holding this job for the next 13 years. From driving he became the commercial manager of a local building firm in 1962, but his memories of his colleagues in the railway industry remained keen.

"Noo, gentlemen," Hugh began the meeting one day. "Let's get tae the point o' this meetin'. Ah think we were gaun tae sae somethin' aboot life on the railways because that's whit Jenny is here fur. Ah think Harry had somethin' tae say. Is that richt?" Hugh turned towards Harry and I.

"Dae ye ken the 'caller oot', Jenny?" Harry asked. I shook my head.

The 'caller oot' was employed between the hours of midnight and 6 am to wake up men to ensure that they arrived for their different shifts and also to ensure that any urgent work could be dealt with. The men captured the event of 'callin-oot' in a range of events which had taken on the mantle of stories, often humorous and exaggerated over the years but deeply part of their working lives.

Harry chuckled at the memory of a new 'callin-oot' sent to Thornton to wake up men for an urgent need to work a breakdown crane. "The new recruit dashes aff tae the village in the middle of the nicht. A' gaes weel at furst. Then he comes tae a door where there isnae the usual swift response tae 'is knockin'. He persists an' eventually a sleepy figure emerges. As the hooseholder stands thier, the caller-oot shouts tae 'im 'Ye've tae turn oot at a' speed!" He then dashes aff tae waken somebdy else. The boy he leaves standin' thier looks mystified, ken. The caller-oot's mistaken hooses! Instead o' callin' up a railwayman he's bin chappin' on the door o' the local minister!" Harry explained that it took time for a 'caller-oot' to know his way round a village. He had to know not only which houses to go to, but often, which windows to 'chap' on.

Many of the railwaymen's exchanges and stories revealed the considerable amount of time they spent with each other, at the expense of their families. Pastimes for example, were primarily male concerns: these included the Thornton football team, whippets, golf and bowling - golf being the main pastime as it was easy to fit into shifts. Card games were also popular.

"The railwaymen - the local ones - were all excellent card players," said Hugh. "Because we had what ye call a spare man an' this is hoo they passed their time. They sat an' played. A' these games were introduced at Thornton an' they spread tae other depots. Rummy had ne'er bin haird o' afore but they went intae Dundee depot and they were sittin' playin' instant rummy. Och it wis a great game. An' it wis play'd all o'er."

Other memories were rekindled by Hugh's comments on the men's leisure pursuits. Harry explained that these card games were played in the depot's ' bothy' - set aside for eating, and passing the time between shifts.

"The men's lockers wis inside the bothy at that time- a' roon the wall," said Harry. "They were big wooden lockers, ken.

"If ye got an odd ha'penny - he jest went like that" Harry flicked his finger and thumb to demonstrate tossing a coin onto the top of the lockers. "An' it went on top o' the lockers - an there'll be hundreds o' poonds up there - if ye shifted the lockers oot ye'd find hundreds of poonds!"

"If ye think aboot it noo. These lockers were inside where the men were sittin' havin' their meals an' they had oil lamps ye ken - things fur oilin' engines" said Harry. "They had tallow lamps - paraffin lamps - lamps wi the wick inside it an' it wis filled wi paraffin. These were a' in the lockers where ye were sittin' in the auld greasy overalls. Ye see ye a'ways kept an auld pair o' overalls in yer locker for preparin' the loco - whit we ca'd 'greasin' overalls' - an ye changed oot yer clean overalls an' put the auld overalls on efter that. Ye put yer clean overalls on again, later. Thon wis a' in the lockers as weel so as ye can jest imagine whit it wis like in the bothy."

"Whit'm Ah sayin'? Och Ah'm jumpin' aboot like a grass-hopper," Harry put his hand to his brow.

"There wis a steel plate -a shelf - alang the top o' the fireplace," Hugh assisted. "An' the men us'd tae carry a bottle o' tea. They ne'er made tea - no' fresh tea at that time. Ye filled up a hauf bottle o' tea - usually wi no milk in it because the milk turned, ye see, an' ye put it up on this plate. Ah've seen a' those bottles sittin' piled on this plate - an the men us'd tae drink this! Nae wonder they were bothered wi their stomachs!"

"The boss - mind he come in wan evenin' when he wis nae greasin', an' he wis standin' in front o' the fire wi the bottle an' the bottle exploded!" Robert laughed. "This is whit happened, Jenny. Some o' them didna loosen the cork - ye ken whit happens then? It builds up pressure ,an' bang! Awa it'd gae. We us'd tae get lemonade bottles. We us'd tae put them on top. Ye loosen the cork an' yer tea landed on ye.!"

"An Ah'll tell ye hoo to recognise a local, Jenny". Hugh stood up. "If ye watch, Jenny, an' ye see a boy walkin' doon the street, like this, ken, wi his hands behind his back," Hugh dramatised the gesture, "ye'd be able tae tell he's a local boy. Because a local boy a'ways stood wi his back tae the fire wi his hands - like that - that's the only way ye protect yersel because if yer hands got tae hot ye knew tae move awa. Because if ye didna yer overalls went on fire."

Concluding comments

Rather than trying to make sense of these exchanges, directed towards me, and sometimes rambling and unfocused, my effort in the remaining part of this chapter is directed at drawing conclusions for their cultural significance.

What distinguished these meetings from other reminiscence groups I had attended? Their purpose was to record the men's history. The presence of a microphone and the tangible objective of making a recording perhaps helped to instil a different tone into the meeting. That the men felt they had a history, because they had a profession, animated and provided the momentum for group discussion. Certainly, in that sense, these meetings were a far cry from those I had tried to set up among the women at Phillip House. But there was something else here too. It had to do with the unity of their background. Their memories of their past depended on a social network of shared experiences, derived through their employment, which were reinforced, changed or lost through the process of interaction with their own and other generations. Their decades of work 'on the railway' had given them "nae jest guid company, but a great fraternity" - a brotherhood of railwaymen. This permeated through all the proceedings and it was not hard to appreciate Harry's comment: "Frankly, the men in this industry were men of outstanding character wi a capacity hard to equal in faithful service an' devotion tae duty." Further still, these men were still unquestionably still the railway community even though there was no longer any railway industry present there as such to justify the identity. Recognition of this alone espoused an enormous sense of liminality within the 'world at large'.

The notion of work values and working life was central to the myth of life on the railways that they lived by and rehearsed during such sessions. Truth and completeness of accounts were never at issue in the group. It would, in any case, have been impossible to completely strip away illusion, for this would ignore the necessity and vitality of mythical material in the consciousness as well as unconsciousness. The railwaymen were no more able to live without their imagined brotherhood than were their fathers before them (Anderson, 1983). The only difference lay in the fact that their ancestors' myths and rituals were provided by religion and community (Gillis, 1996:19), whilst theirs were self-generated.

All peoples attempt to form what David Cheal has called temporal convoys, individuals who share a common sense of time, sustaining one another through the difficulties of life's journey (quoted in Gillis, 1996:43). The convoy metaphor

summons up an image of safety from the dangers lurking just below the surface, and, indeed, temporal convoys offer us reassurance against the ravages of time and the fact of human infinitude. The railwaymen formed their temporal convoys largely with their colleagues. The oral history group, symbolising this temporal convoy, provided the rite of passage between one phase of life and another, as well as the model of the good life.

Perhaps the great cultural significance of these meetings was that they were charged with mediating the tensions and contradictions built into the railwaymen's post-retiral years which were threatened, as expressed earlier, with such very different values to those underwriting their years in employment. The group sessions were invitations to culture making; the assembly of men as creators and custodian of their own myths, rituals and images. It may well be that the meetings, like their previous occupations, were the primary location for such values as co-operation, enduring loyalty and moral consideration. Possibly, the men mapped these exclusively onto their colleagues, a cultural burden that ordinary family members would have found difficult, if not impossible, to sustain on an everyday basis.

Chapter 13

Construction and reconstruction of self through autobiography:

The reminiscence group at Phillip House

Introduction

The ethnography forming the text of this penultimate chapter derives from my experience within the reminiscence group at Phillip House. The group comprised solely women and there was no doubt that I viewed what took place there as 'problematic' - largely because of difficulties associated with getting the women to talk about their past lives. In chapter 2 some of the external problems that had created difficulties in encouraging participation - exacerbated by the warden's illness and ensuing absence - were identified. Ultimately, however, these problems were submerged by a considerably more formidable obstacle stemming, somewhat ironically, from a pervading self-consciousness of each participant's consciousness of self. As a result, the self was buried so far out of sight that, to paraphrase the comment by Gearing (1970:146) in his study of Native Americans, the women did not reveal themselves because it did not occur to them that they had unique selves to reveal.

In this chapter I explore some encounters with the reminiscence group, paying particular attention to certain of its features. In so doing, I have tried to seek reconciliation between my experiences of the genuinely sociable events I attended and those of this group which, contrary to all my initial intentions, never resembled a 'sociable event'. Where confusion existed in my mind as to why, under certain circumstances, participants projected one sort of identity and, under other circumstances, another sort of identity I have tried to seek clarity. Where meaning was submerged by participants saying one thing when they meant another I have tried to project illumination. In keeping with the theme of this section - the relation of ritual to reflexive knowledge - I have tried to place interpretations on the role of each 'kind' of knowledge in the development of identity. This was not at all straightforward because the roles themselves were neither obvious nor open to interpretation. Looking upon reminiscence as performance I had mistakenly assumed that reflexivity, the work of paying attention to their experience (Daly, 1996:46), would somehow unfold. It did not. At least not in any direct manner. What I felt I was dealing with much of the

time were matters beyond language, born in the world of liminality and anti-structure -'a world of which the *processes* of ritual (were) the language' (Turner, 1992:14, emphasis in original).

Observing the work of the reminiscence group at Phillip House

I had been prepared for the coffee mornings not allowing much in the way of self-documentation. The performances of the public meetings, at Phillip House and Windsor Court, were a time for routine and busy-ness: what Geertz refers to as 'bustling ritualism' (1973b:183). They were times for catching up on the past week's activities, enquiring about health and about the price of bread. They were not a time for self-reflection, for thoughtfulness, for ordering one's life. In addition, personal reflection exemplified a sort of self-indulgence which would have been regarded as improper behaviour during these gatherings. As observed in chapter 8, the residents held themselves accountable and responsible for good behaviour. Emotions, inner states, motivations - inevitable products of remembering - were not included in their code of dignity. The coffee mornings were opportunities for discharging short-term information about oneself and others; they were times when residents were generally disinclined to plumb the depths of their own history for any length of time. The reminiscence group, on the other hand, posed its own challenges, and forced me to reconsider how to *author* the truth about the women (Hastrup, 1992:126). Taking the actions and speeches themselves as 'events' the anthropological text would have been quickly exhausted. What is therefore written is the meaning of action and speech rather than the events themselves (Hastrup, 1992:125), studying the ethnographic experience not at face value but in all its 'sensational' depth (Hastrup, 1994:224).

The 'problem' of the reminiscence group

I commented earlier that I began this study with an open mind. With hindsight, however, I have to admit that this wasn't completely true. Throughout my study I leaned heavily on my own beliefs that every person I met had some story; every group I encountered and every house I went into held lives that could be penetrated and known. Nothing and no-one was banal. I had convinced myself that this was the case. Yet, so often, I felt that my subjects were attempting to convince me of quite the opposite.

In her paper entitled *Selves in Hiding* Patricia Meyer Spacks observes that the housewife 'seldom offers her life to public view' (1980:112). For a long time I struggled with the consequences of this observation. I wanted words, not silences, to put down on paper and every part of my scientific 'objective' disposition remonstrated with the

offerings I was handed. Some of the women seemed to believe that they had nothing of significance to say. Although others sought through the fragments of their earlier experiences of childhood to legitimise their later commitments, few offered any distinct sense of individual narrative. Most projected through their life stories a profound lack of self-confidence. Even the way they constructed narratives of their lives seemed to undermine themselves. Why did they do this? My struggles to find answers to this question taught me some valuable lessons concerning women's autobiography and it is from this didactic experience that I have developed the text of this chapter.

The value of reminiscence to adjustment in old age

That reminiscence is an appropriate and healthy activity undertaken by older people was suggested several years ago by the American psychiatrist Robert Butler, in his article: 'The Life Review: an interpretation of reminiscence in the aged' (Butler, 1968). Butler's contribution was his documentation of reminiscence as a normal activity in old age and, indeed, as a performance *process* that people may have to undergo if they are to come to terms with their lives as they have lived them. Since Butler's article there have been a number of important contributions to the understanding of reminiscence (Coleman, 1993b:105) and, in more recent years, trends to promote 'reminiscence therapy' among groups of older people, especially those living in institutions (Help the Aged, 1981).

Coleman (1993b:105) remarks upon the label 'identity maintenance' theory, which has been generated to distinguish it from 'life review' theory. Identity maintenance theory claims that a greater identification with past lives and past achievements is helpful to older people in situations of deprivation and loss. The discrepancy between how one would like to live one's life and how one is actually leading it is minimised by stressing the value of the life that has already been lived - this, in itself, justifying a sense of self-worth.

For many of the men referred to in my study, life review was a passionate concern. In Jim's case, recollection of an individual biography provided the important feeling of personal continuity; for the railwaymen, the recollection of group history was important for the feeling of collective sameness. Common strands were, however, woven into these apparently separate *modus operandi*. All had experienced loss or deprivation of one sort or another. All, too, were seeking to identify the people they had been, in order to justify the people they now were, and to find a sense of worth. They

sought to validate their individual and collective claims to have lived a worthy life through the articulation of linkages between their own biographies and the social and economic history of their world.

Lessons concerning women's autobiography

To begin with, my pre-occupation with the reminiscence group focused on what I felt was a lack of content emerging within the oral narratives. In the quietness of their own flats and outside of the gaze of others matters were different. Under these circumstances, many of the women were quite content to review their lives. Yet even here they played down their domestic and professional lives, producing not glowing narratives but, as Jelinek (1980:15) comments, straightforward accounts. Not that the search through the past was necessarily linear. They would sort through their past, rearranging it and groping towards the understanding that they seemed to be seeking. Some of their memories were kept well-polished and carefully stored. They took them out, mentally leafing through them to rediscover what had been lost. More often than not they would drift over their accomplishments and achievements emphasising their failures at least as often as their successes.

In her book entitled *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, Susan Smith points up reasons why women retreat from discussion about their lives and, in particular, autobiography. She notes the assumption that their own biographies must somehow contain 'the intellectual outlook revealed in the style of an eminent person who has played a part in the forming of the spirit of his time' (Misch, p.8, quoted in Smith, 1987). The women saw themselves as 'failures' when it came to answering the eternal epistemological questions: 'What do I know?' 'What can I know?' 'How can I know?' How do I know?' Much of their knowledge was based not on the objective judgement of information, but on intuition, the substance of dreams, fantasies and hunches (Rothschild, 1983). They had yielded to social and ideological changes in which they presumed a low value was accorded to perception, subjective and personal projection, compared with reality, scientific facts, efficiency concepts and economy of thought. Thus, whilst autobiographical renditions in the privacy of their own home might have had therapeutic and releasing properties, in the presence of other people, whom one did not completely trust, the private became altogether too public, revealing one's apparent intellectual failures and vulnerability, and transferring to the listener an almost unbearable degree of power.

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What was permitted to be on view, in the presence of others, was epitomised by Heather's brief account of her early life.

"Ah wis born in nineteen-oh-one in Dunfermline an' Ah went tae Pittencrief Primary. Ma gran'mither brocht me up because ma mither died when she wis thirty. She had twa boys - ma twa aulder brithers - an' me.

"When Ah wis twelve Ah went tae the High School. There wis only yin High School then, an' it wis a fee-paying school an' ma gran-mither paid fur me tae go there. But she had a stroke an' Ah had tae return hame at fifteen, tae look efter her. Ah'd wanted tae be a nurse, but ye couldna gae fur nurses' trainin' until ye were twenty-one, so Ah went an' learned business accounts an' short-haun trainin' instead. But Ah wis happy'; we a' were - e'en though we hadnae a penny tae oor names. We were happy.

"Ah'm sorry that Ah didna train tae be a nurse but that wis the way o' things. Ye see Ah met ma husband when Ah wis twenty-one an' we married at twenty-two. He wis three year aulder than me." She sighed and looked across at me.

"An' that wis it. Ah didna work efter that."

It was as though Heather had erected someone outside herself who was her husband's wife. She seemed lost somewhere deep down inside herself and refused to dwell on or, perhaps, even to recognise her own experiences. Her systematic self-deprecation, enshrined in her closing statement, emphasised her unwillingness to declare a powerful sense of self.

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In common with many of the women, Margaret's account of her life was heavily informed by first, her father's role and, then, her husband's.

“Ah come frae Crombie, a wee village jest west o' Charlestoun. It wis lovely. Ah had a very happy childhood. Ah used tae walk richt doon tae the sea. We moved frae Crombie tae Dunfermline fur a new job fur ma Da. He worked on the pier where the fishing boats used tae come in. Ah'm nae sure exactly whit he did.

"Ah left school at fowerteen- usual fur girls o' ma generation. Ma furst job wis potato pickin'. Then, yin day, Ah come back fae work an' ma Maw says that Ah wis gaun tae work in Dunfermline.

"When the War started Ah moved fae makin' rubber fur shoes tae makin' stuff fur the War effort. Ah moved back tae the depot at Crombie durin' the War years.

"Then, the War ower, Ah started thinkin' aboot new work. Ma freen in the factory says, why not try the sortin' office at the Post Office? So Ah worked fur fifteen year at Tounhill, then sixteen year at Rosyth.

"Whilst at Rosyth, a man called Jock, a local policeman, used tae come in every nicht fur his tea. One day, a woman customer asked why he didna gae hame tae his wife, fur his tea. He replied that he wisna married. She says 'Whit are ye waitin' fur - there's Margaret there!'

"Weel, o' course, Ah blushed deep wi embarrassment. But the next nicht, leavin' work an' walkin' doon the High Street, Ah met Jock an' he asked if Ah'd like tae gae oot wi him. That wis the furst date.

"He wis a wonderful man. We were married fur six month only, an' he took his furst stroke. By the time oor Silver Weddin' Anniversary came alang we had moved tae Phillip House. Jock died three an' a hauf year ago. He'd bin havin' mair strokes. But on the fourth of August he took the final wan. He died in hospital on the echt[1] of August."

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Moira's account was similarly devoid of a sense of self but also revealed another reason for the down-playing of events of her past.

" Ma husband wis English - frae Sunderland. He'd bin tae a private school until the age o' echt. His English wis nae Geordie but Queen's English frae furth[2] o' Scotland.

"Ah wis in hairdressin' tae begin wi, then Ah worked in a factory. Ah had ma family o' course.

"Ah'd bin engaged tae a local lad in nineteen-thirty-nine - but then broke it aff. Ah joined the WRENS an', as the years passed, Ah felt ma fiancé's absence made him

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1 eighth

2 Outside

mair an' mair a stranger. Ah met ma husband. He wis in the RAF - a guid man. He died seventeen year afore - at sixty-seven. He'd only bin retired fur three year."

Moira's story unfolded a by no means unusual amount of grief and pain in her life. "Ah retired when Ah wis sixty. We've fower bairns - Helen, Wullie an' Tam. David'd died on a mountain at sixteen. Wullie wis knocked o'er by a car an' left wi the palsy - unable tae walk wi straight feet. "Helen gaes every week, the noo, an' helps her brithers tae clean their hooses, an' Wullie comes in every day tae see me.

"There's nocht wurse than losin' a child. It's the wurse thing that can happen tae ye."

Given the crushing terms of many of their earlier lives, perhaps there were good reasons to allow them to remain in obscurity. For example, Elsie, another group member, had been born in 1902, in Polton, into a family of eight children: four girls and four boys. Her father had worked in the local papermill. She had married a miner and moved to Saline, north of Dunfermline, where she lived for 60 years before her move to Phillip House. Three of her four brothers had been killed in the First World War. Even whilst we were talking, she commented that: 'it still hurt to remember this'. Her surviving brother had died in 1991. If memories of the past caused pain, removing them from the position of the present seemed logical - the women possibly justifying this by deeming them irrelevant to on-going concerns. For Daly reminds us that the relation between the present and the past is never well-defined but, to be recalled, the past life must be relevant to some 'ongoing project' (1996:47) and reconstructed on the basis of present conditions (Halbwachs, 1992).

This wasn't to downplay the significance of their memories. Often quite unforgettable experiences seemed to act like moments of revelation - epiphanies - containing, as Myerhoff (1984:327) describes it, 'the distilled truth of an entire life'. For example, Martha, originally from Portsmouth but who had lived for forty years in Fife, would talk in length about her sons. In her clipped English accent she explained to me how one, a talented artist, had been killed at a young age in a car accident.

"He was such a lovely young lad. We called him the sunshine lad - always happy and full of life. I feel he's here with me now - beside me. I don't feel that I've lost him for ever." She explained. "When I went to see him at the morgue I looked at him and I thought to myself 'he's fantastic'! His pale, fair skin - his eyes were shut of course. But I felt this tremendous surge of energy - almost like electricity running through me. And the only way I can describe this is that it was fantastic."

The language of life review

Reticence among the women towards autobiography crystallised around their self-image, an aspect explored in chapter 4. Many had conformed to the ideal of domestic femininity, centering their lives around home and family and now responding passively to situations where they may have cause to find their own achievements in life measured against those of others. It was common for them to remark that their lives were 'unimportant' despite considerable evidence to the contrary. This was hidden in detached statements. Thus, Sarah was 'frae Dunfermline' - born and bred - and had lived there 80 years. Lottie was also 'frae Dunfermline'. She had married twice - her first husband had died and 21 years later she married again - to a man who was in the navy. They travelled the world. Her professional occupation had been that of shop assistant. Bella was from further north and had been brought up in a crofting family. She was a skilled parachute maker and had come south to Dunfermline during the War. Mabel had been a domestic cleaner and had worked in a factory. Netty, now beginning to suffer from dementia, had been an artist and calligrapher. Irene had been born in Hampshire and had come north to Dunfermline when she was 16. She had hated the move and said that she had cried 'ev'ry nicht'. But she stayed and married a man who worked at the pit head. In a number of instances the women had just started working as teenagers, then been compelled to return home to help look after the children following the birth of another family member. When they did work they were expected to give their parents all their earnings and pocket money was returned to them.

As my study had progressed I had found myself wanting these women to be loved and admired as a result of it. But I realised that if I portrayed their accomplishments as articulated, I would be doing them a dis-service. Their oral narratives failed directly to emphasise their own importance. Although several revealed indirect means 'of declaring personal power and effectiveness' they did so, as it were, 'in disguise' (Meyer Spacks, 1980:114). Rather than leaning on their past successes for present visibility, they sought other opportunities to become visible 'daein' fur others': assisting with shopping, providing company, offering other forms of assistance and encouragement. This in itself was a re-enactment of their past lives, an 'action speaks louder than words' performance which reflected the fact that they were required, by circumstance, to be pragmatists, often with the need for business acumen and always with the need for tremendous energy. On one occasion, during a conversation alone with Nora, one of the group's participants, the industry in her

home, when newly married, in the weeks leading up to Christmas was described with enthusiasm.

"Durin' the War Ah'd a lot o' young brothers an' sisters an' ye could nae get things fur their Christmas." In a low voice, as though allowing me to share in a great secret, she said: "We spent nichts an' nichts an' nichts in ma husband's workshop, makin' toys fur the kids. Ye couldna hae done it any other way!

"Ma young sister - she's still got the little set of furniture that she got fur her Christmas. Ah made wan fur Joan tae. Ah made twa little dolls fur each o' them..they were made wi bandages, painted wi aeroplane dope - an' Ah made clothes fur them.

"When the young ane says 'whit will Ah ca' ma dolls?' ma Uncle says 'call 'em Kate an' Duplicate!'" Nora laughed. "So that's whit she ca'ed 'em.

"Then Ah had a job where Ah wis cyclin' roon twa minin' villages, gaun fur the orders fur oor grocery shop - we had a grocery shop - an' a' the lads were awa...they'd bin ca'd up. But Ah went roon an' there were kids in the hooses...mithers wi kids an' Ah started makin' little dugs. They were made oot o' an auld tweed skirt an' when Ah gie them tae a kid, Ah says 'he's call'd Tweedie'. Ah tell ye there were mair dogs call'd Tweedie than ye could count!"

"Ah sewed. It wis sewin' Ah wis interested in. Ah wis headin' fur an academic career, but it wis sewin' Ah wis interested in. After Ah left the shop Ah went tae tailorin' classes. Ah'd ne'er bin tae dress-makin' classes but Ah'd picked it up as Ah went alang."

Alternative means of accessing personal memory

I thought about alternative means of harvesting the store of their lives. If they didn't want to talk openly in a group perhaps they might be willing to write. And so I suggested tentatively that the writing of a diary or journal may be interesting means of reflection. I was immediately to regret my cavalier approach. The following week only half the group put in an appearance.

That the women were not in the habit of perpetually narrating themselves, in the form of keeping notes, journals, writing poems and spontaneous reflections did not come as a surprise. It was perhaps understandable that, among people with whom they had shared only a small percentage of their lives, they would be unwilling to permit access to these personal memories. Perhaps they, like Woodward (1995:92), had no desire to

return to the past - associating the journey with something regressive and weak - a nostalgic yearning that they knew could not be satisfied. Perhaps, as discussed above, the retrieval of past lives was too painful or no longer relevant. Among some, however, it seemed their fears penetrated deeper than this. It was as though they felt that their lives would reveal only visible wreckage; as though they possessed a secret, terrible consuming grief of failure. Even a hint that the discussion of lives within the circle of women in the group might find whispering conduits beyond this, was too much for them, despite the fact that they had been assured that their words would not make of them public objects. Unlike the railwaymen, they did not tell their stories to whoever would listen - not because they were without stories, but because they thought they were without listeners. Even were those listeners present the women would never have presumed their predilection to listen or to sustain the level of integrity and mutual honesty that was required if they were to reveal their vulnerability. Smith explains this in terms of the 'potentially catastrophic' nature of rebellious pursuit among women (1987:9). 'To call attention to her distinctiveness is to become "unfeminine". To take a voice and to authorise a public life are to risk loss of reputation. Hence, distinctiveness may never be attractive in and out of itself" (Smith, 1987:9-10). Stories about themselves, told by themselves, with the intent of dissemination, would imply a personal significance that they felt was unjustified. This troubled the women who felt, by asserting the exemplary shape of their experience, obliged to defend themselves against the charge of vanity. In any case, for many, their daily work was so taken for granted that over a lifetime it was not deemed by them to be worthy fuel for my listening time when it came to considering what had absorbed the vast majority of the hours of their life. They seemed to be humbled by the nature of their everyday activities. They apparently adopted the same consistent and permanent devaluation of women by societies all over the world (Ortner, 1974). To up the ante, old and female to boot.

The double marginality may have explained why autobiographical analysis in this women's reminiscent group was such a tortuous process. Just like 18th and 19th century women's autobiographies (Jelinek, 1980:8) the vignettes scattered throughout this chapter focused on domestic details and relationships with other people. Even where a woman's professional life was her claim to fame, this aspect was often omitted. In her introduction to 'Women's Autobiography' Jelinek found that the women would refer 'obliquely to their careers or camouflage them behind the personal aspects of their lives' (1980:8). She suggests perhaps the unspoken, or even unthinkable, when assessing how critics evaluate the experiences of women in their

autobiographies. 'As men, these women's experiences would be described in heroic or exceptional terms: alienation, initiation, manhood, apotheosis, transformation, guilt, identity crises, and symbolic journeys. As women, their experiences are viewed in more conventional terms: heartbreak, anger, loneliness, motherhood, humility, confusion and self-abnegation' (1980:5). The result was that 'claims to fame', in the public sense, were, as shown below, rarely acknowledged.

'Ah didna want tae say it in front o' the ithers'

One Monday we had spent time during the reminiscence group focusing on 'happy and significant events' in people's lives. It had been a difficult and unyielding session. At the end, when all but one participant had left, she turned to me and, as if to explain, said. "Ah had somethin' tae tell ye, but Ah didna want to say it in front of the others." She hesitated, then spoke. "The best moment in ma life wis in London in Nineteen Forty-Six whin Ah took part in the Victory March.

"Ye see, Ah'd bin awarded the BEM[3] and that'd earned me the richt tae march. Naebdy here kens this"

She explained that she could not have possibly told them all this and gesticulated towards her head: the other women would think her boasting and would think she had a swollen head.

For the same reason, although it was important to them, no woman openly prided herself on 'goodness' because as soon as 'goodness' became 'public' it lost its altruism. In chapter 7 this was the view the lunch club participants had taken of Janet's gifts. The character of goodness depends on its being done for its own sake; the women could never 'openly value the image of a selfless self' - yet they 'conveyed this ideal of selflessness and their frustration at the impossibility of achieving it'. Thus, in the situation where goodness is selflessness and selflessness is goodness then autobiographies, as Meyer Spacks (1980:116) suggests, become difficult because these are about selves.

Gender differences in the reconstruction of past lives

Like a buoy that had lost its anchor I drifted helplessly among the ebb and flow of conversation in the reminiscence group. It mattered little what the starting point had

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[3] British Empire Medal

been we were always harassed by a moral dilemma that arose from the women's beliefs in subordinating the demands of the self to those of others. Among them was an over-riding sense of obligation: what they *ought* to do (such as talking about their husband's interests) being more important than what they *wanted* to do.

The women were motivated by a sense of responsibility towards others. Happiness, they implied derived, implicitly or explicitly, from their quality of relationships - a point of view often considered particularly feminine (Meyer Spacks, 1980:122). They often justified themselves and their claims of a happy marriage by their husband's belief that women should fill social as well as domestic functions. Although some of them sought through the fragments of their earlier experiences of childhood to legitimise their later commitments, few offered any distinct sense of individual destiny. Most projected, through their life stories, a profound lack of self-confidence. Their stories were not embellished or heroic; they were rarely exaggerated or mythologized. Even the way they constructed narratives of their lives seemed to undermine them: they were 'not chronological and progressive but disconnected and fragmentary' in line with Pomerleau's (1980:17) comments, reflecting 'the interrupted nature of their lives', or 'organised into self-sustained units rather than connecting chapters.' (Pomerleau, 1980:17). The women's narratives fell into what Smith calls the 'wild zone', lying 'outside the dominant culture's boundaries in a spatial, experiential and metaphysical "no-man's land"' (1987:9).

Jelinek (1980:14) touches on this basic difference - these binary oppositions - in the ingredients of men's compared with women's autobiographies. And it was hard not to agree. How different were the men's responses! How confident and assured, how crafted and aesthetic were Fergus and Jim's autobiographical accounts. In these were a conscious shaping of the events of their life into a coherent whole. Yet none of the men related their lives entirely unself-consciously; they sifted through for explanation and understanding. The listener had to be convinced of their self-worth and their self-image required authentication. Their memories espoused lifestyles infused with a set of beliefs which held relationships together. By means of a chronological, linear narrative, they unified their life by concentrating on one period, one theme or one characteristic of their personality, bequeathing a sense that they were still the same people now that they had always been, however transformed. The crucial motive was a desire to synthesise. Continuity was the key thread.

In their own ways, therefore, the men were able to display a profound sense of unity through their lives: everything that came before was purposeful and directed towards

what was to come after. Jim, for example, had come to terms with his life and sorted and ordered it into chapters of experience. He offered few regrets. He had measured the learning of his life's experiences and, like Fergus, evaluated that measure and decided it was sufficient. The integrity of the person over time was their essential quest. They showed that, through autobiography, as Myerhoff has skilfully reflected, they could construct not only an 'orderly and moral tale' about themselves; they could construct their 'selves' (Myerhoff, 1979:221).

The strength of women's autobiography

Reflecting on the differences between men and women's autobiography in my study I was troubled by the casual leap to a conclusion that the autobiographical accounts of the women in the reminiscence group were unable to tell me anything about their real 'selves' or help to clarify my understanding of how reminiscence, as performance, was able to assist adjustment among the women in old age. Their accounts did not square with the people I knew at coffee, or at activities and events. In particular, if autobiography provided the means to construct a 'self' (Myerhoff, 1979:221) and had such a profound role to play in the lives of the elderly, it seemed that these women must then be the losers and this then would seem to detract from the increasingly widespread conviction, documented by Myerhoff (1979:262), that women appear to be 'better' at being old than men.

I was unhappy to draw this chapter to a close and, like the nature of autobiographies, to end inconclusively in mid-stream. I felt that I should be reading things differently because it seemed to me that the women, by their omissions, were making statements. But what were these statements and what were the ideas, motives and goals which made the women act in this way?

The second half of this chapter seeks to elicit responses to these questions. In order to interpret the differences between the reminiscing that took place among the group of men (chapter 12) and the group of women in this chapter, I have drawn upon the instrumental-expressive dichotomy sometimes used by sociologists with a view to understanding human behaviour or the social organisation they study (Rossi, 1976:287). First, I outline what I understand as the instrumental-expressive domains. Second, I explore gender identity as it relates to these domains; and, third, gender identity as it relates to generational linkage. I make the assumption that the women acted in the way they did in order to achieve certain ends in the face of their individual circumstances as they saw them.

Expressive and instrumental domains

Some writers argue that women in all cultures are emotional leaders in their family and community (Myerhoff, 1979:261). Certainly, Sandra, the warden, adopted the role of emotional leader within Phillip House and so, to a lesser extent did some of the residents who had transferred prior responsibilities for the nurturing of family to the nurturing of other residents in their new home. Jean, for example, took over a primary nurturing role during a critical period that developed when Sandra became ill. Sandra was, however, the meta-nurturer and their designated role model. Through her own example she facilitated the development of interpersonal relationships and all those concerns surrounding quality of life - a behaviour which some sociologists refer to as the 'expressive' dimension of behaviour contrasting it to the more goal-directed, problem oriented, focused activities called 'instrumental' (Parsons and Bales, 1955).

Alice Rossi (1976:287) argues that the typological dichotomies used as general principles to account for some significant portion of complex human behaviour should not be applied indiscriminately to all types of social phenomena. In this way, the dichotomies of 'instrumental', characterised by rationality, efficiency, rejection of tradition, and 'expressive', characterised by nurturance, integration, tension-management, ritual and interpersonal solidarity, applied to gender roles, generally leads to the husband-father emerging as 'instrumental' leader, and wife-mother as 'expressive' centre of the family (Rossi, 1976:288). In the context of my interpretations of the differences between men and women's autobiography, however, I have found it necessary to free myself from the assumption of a single bipolar continuum of masculinity-femininity; authority-integration; dependence-independence; nature-culture; in order to acknowledge that, within any role, increased instrumentality, for example, can be observed without necessarily implying decreased expressiveness, and *vice versa* (Rossi, 1976:291). Whilst sociologists such as Brim (1957) assign a father role to the instrumental category, and others, such as Zelditch (1955), a mother role to the expressive category, the dichotomous usage of these terms, linked to gender, leads, as Rossi (1976:291) shows, to distortion rather than illumination. Indeed, the comment above, relating to women's advantage over men in old age, draws upon the assumption that because old age itself engages 'expressive' rather than 'instrumental' behaviour, it therefore follows that women, who score higher on the expressive domain, must be better at ageing than men. However useful such a distinction might be to the interpretation of social phenomena I do not find it a useful

distinction to draw here. What I *do* find useful, however, is to explore the balance between these two structural axes for different roles. Expressive and instrumental, like nature and culture, are categories of thought, not discrete entities. I suggest that the independent dimensions of instrumentality and expressiveness exist together, whether in the role of father, husband, wife or mother (Rossi, 1976:288). Thus, it may be possible to observe, through autobiography, that the elderly woman reveals a number of both expressive and instrumental requirements for competence in her role as 'mother bringing up children' and that both of these are important in adjustment in old age. So, too, the elderly man, in the parental role of former years, may have been involved in encounters with his children that, for adequate performance, required just as much 'expressive' behaviour as his wife, but carried no necessary implication of a change in the instrumental dimension of his role.

Women's mediating role between nature and culture

One may apply Rossi's reasoning (1976:287) to the nature-culture continuum. Ortner (1974:837) expresses the widespread subordination of women in terms of women's mediating role between nature and culture. Women are identified as responsible for the work of 'nature' while 'culture' it is said, is officially the work of men. She argues, however, that women do not simply bear children: they nurture them and are crucially involved in the primary socialisation of infants - vital for the perpetuation of culture (Spencer, 1990:14) and a role engaging strongly instrumental dimensions. Many writers feel that women concur with men in viewing 'cultural' projects as more valuable activities than their 'natural' enterprises. Yet whilst the absence among the women of formal vocalisation relating to their taken-for-granted roles of wife and mother might have implied to me that they considered these less valuable, what right had I to conclude that this was the case? After all, the women never actually said to me 'I think my life as wife and mother has been less valuable'. On the contrary, as I argue below, they may have thought quite the reverse.

Gender identity in relation to expressive and instrumental domains

I turn now to an ethnographic example drawn from one of the reminiscence group meetings. On the particular day in question I had read to the group from the pages of Kellogg Durand's book 'Among the Fife miners' (Durand, 1904). The theme of the piece I had selected was the subordination of women.

'The lives of the women were given up to making the lives of the men comfortable' so the text began. Women were expected to possess the basic skills of cooking, cleaning and finance. They would be regarded as anti-social if they could not be trusted to help their neighbours. Men, on the other hand, were considered to occupy-emotionally neutral territory, their concerns purposive and oriented to external needs and problems, more centred in the public world. They were expected to be responsible for waged labour and the financial sustenance of the family. They were expected to lack practical, domestic and organisational skills and those who tried to cross the division were regarded as a source of humour.

'Normal' roles for men at home were gardening or coal-collecting. The women were responsible for financial organisation in the family, all domestic labour, nurturing and childcare and caring and organisational roles in the wider community.

I read out loud two pages of the book and then asked the women what they thought about what I had read. There was a muted response to my query. Kate, who had married a farmer, said that she could remember the same attitude to which the book referred. Others could remember that men would never have had to clean their own shoes, iron their own shirts or do any housework. When they reflected on current social attitudes they felt that things had changed for the better. It was, however, difficult to know what they meant by this. When Lottie, for example, affirmed, in the statement "there's nocht wrang in the pride in maintaining a spotless hame", how she looked upon it as her duty and desire to produce a sparkling home, the other women concurred with her opinion. When I tried to delve more deeply, I was left dissatisfied. '"The real difference, hen," said Sarah, with a concluding comment, "is that men want tae tak an interest in their children. Before, they'd ignored them". In this one statement, Sarah underlined the considerable burden of the instrumental dimension of parenting undertaken by women.

The all-powerful matriarch

Central virtues in the celebration and evaluation of women were being a good grandmother, mother, peacekeeper or homemaker. Men's work, on the other hand was regarded as the ultimate specimen of masculinity, inextricably bound up with life in the pits, on the railway or doing industrial or engineering work. The stereotyped and celebrated image of man related to work: hardships, danger and outcome and attainment (instrumental); that of women related to home, and was associated with more diffuse emotional and biological concerns (expressive). This informed a

stereotypical image of men and women and helped to legitimise a rigid sexual division of labour.

The potent image of 'mother' was provided by Jim (chapter 6) when he spoke about his own: that of an all-powerful matriarch in complete control of the home. This was confirmed in writings by Dan Imrie (*undated*) about the mining way of life: 'I don't think many would have made the early morning shift if it had not been for the mother. The shift began at 6 am and since I had 3 miles to travel to the pit by bicycle, rising time for my family was 4.30 am. For ten years, from the time I started work 'til I left home to get married, it was left to mother to make sure my brothers and I rose in time. This was general practice with single men in the industry. No matter how tired you were when you heard mother's rousing call 'Rising time boys', you had to obey at all times. Mother's voice was law in our house'.

The home was synonymous with mother. Home was safety - a second mother with ways of dispelling every anxiety, and it was mother who engineered the sheer regularity with which the same things happened every day - a regularity which was in itself a form of comfort and security. It was mother who was responsible for firmness and consistency; the ability to manage time and energy; to plan and organise activities involving her children; to teach and train them, transferring to them personal and value discriminations. Indeed, it might be predicted that an exhaustive account of the actual components of both male and female roles within the private, domestic sphere, would show a considerably higher proportion of both instrumental and expressive components in the role of wife and mother and that it is this balance, rather than the assumption of purely expressive skills that assists women in old age.

In charge of both expressive and instrumental concerns women were responsible for the well-being of others, especially their family members, and for creating an emotional ambience in the home. Yet at the same time they carried the burden of the instrumental dimension of parenting. As wives and mothers they had to navigate the often conflicting waters between home, community and the outside world. They had to manage the household, regulate time, funds and attention within the family, make numerous practical decisions, allocate labour, and organise and integrate family schedules. The duality of effort this required of women often burdened them with a series of stereotypically contradictory characteristics: nagging but caring; holding a tight rein on the family finances but always providing the family staples. Compared with the men, they had experienced less connection with and less need for each other. In his study of north-east England mining communities Dawson (1990:120)

emphasises the significance of women's concerns in his claim that the domestic labour of the miner's wife was essential to the man's production. He describes how the women's role was not only considered crucial to the livelihood and safety of the miners, but that the latter's very life was dependent upon this. But the contribution was not always positive. Thus, a mining accident blamed on a miner's particular lack of concentration at work could, in turn, be traced back to emotional difficulties, a lack of harmony or trauma at home, the resolution of which was considered the responsibility of the woman. A miner's wife might very well be culpable for the misfortune of a mining accident itself. These were unfortunately all too common and, together with poor health, ensured that many husbands retired from their work long before their statutory time. The women picked up the burden of nursing men disabled for life by the conditions of pit work.

Women were socially and ideologically bound into their 'industry' and although illness in old age may mean their earlier transition from carer to cared for, old age in itself did not confer automatic rights for women to retire from their nurturing function which in itself required instrumental as well as integrative skills.

Roles rooted in the functions of nurturing and domestic management are, in any case, arguably more durable and transferable in that there is always someone around who needs care. At Phillip House Jean did what she had always done, taking care of Jim and 'the hame'. Despite her own ill health, she was always cheerful, enthusiastic, talking freely about her childhood and the concerns she had as she grew older. The instrumental dimension of Jim's working life, on the other hand, did not convert readily into a housebound existence. The living room was like a theatrical stage; its suite, fitted carpet, sideboard and cupboards its props within which Jim sat, still determining his role. He 'hung about' in his chair, reading the paper whilst Jean bustled around cleaning, making tea, knitting and sewing. It was Jean who acted as secretary taking the minutes of the monthly residents' meeting, visiting neighbours who were unwell or bereaved, managing their pensions and, as though she had been born a grandmother, playing with the grandchildren when they visited.

One might argue that the nurturing role has other advantages: placing the carer in an elevated, independent position and demanding obligations and thanks from the individual receiving that care. Beyond this, caring for others teaches the care of oneself. The women's domestic religion consisted of caring for children, washing, ironing, shopping, cleaning, cooking, mending and refuse disposal. These comprised women's work and the ability of women to continue to perform in these

basic domestic spheres was a source of satisfaction for them. Furthermore, women's work might be done collectively (Dawson, 1990:55). In Dawson's mining communities women, through sheer need, organised themselves to build resilient and flexible social networks around what was often a painfully isolating domestic sphere (Williamson, 1982). Myerhoff (1979:262) comments that 'this state of affairs gives older women an enormous advantage over men, for their earlier expressive specialisation continues to be viable in later years. No wonder many women appear to be better at being old than men, for the male's life-long involvement with instrumental activities is not viable after retirement.'

Since childhood the women had been *bricoleurs*[4]. Mostly without education and undifferentiated from the stream of women among whom they now lived, they knew how to devise entire but miniature worlds out of their secondary status and tasks. Their worlds were made with smaller and less flamboyant materials but built with proportion, as complex and compelling as the external, male dominated realm. In her own world, the woman was in charge, using time and energy according to her own requirements. She was the one on whom others depended. Within the structured points of her day in the household she did a great many highly diverse tasks - always expecting interruptions - hastening from one activity to the next. Her standards for performance had to be flexible and individually administered. To the extent that their husbands occupied a separate domain the women were given a degree of autonomy through the close bonds of their informal groupings, which enabled them to transcend the stultifying limits of domestic existence. In these created worlds, therefore, the women drew from a range of opportunities presented during their life to become experts at old age.

Patriarchal world

The railwaymen and the miners, on the other hand, had been accustomed to both accepting and recognising their need for each other, both economically and for reasons of survival. As Dawson (1990) documents, the ever-present threat of death in the mines - where miners lived on the knife edge of life and death - informed notions of male identity and served to legitimise certain aspects of male behaviour. Relations

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[4] Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966:17) uses the word *bricolage* to describe the process through which myths are created in pre-literate societies. Anecdotes, odds and ends and practically anything offered up by chance or the environment are taken up by a group, incorporated into a tale and used by a people to explain themselves and their world.

pivoted on the fulcrums of sociability, honesty, scorn for the love of money; the ability to 'stand yer roon'; scorn for one-up-manship; financial modesty, and so on. These elements were celebrated. They were also exaggeratedly over-emphasised and enforced. There was a dislike of discussing money and a hate of pretentiousness and insincerity. The aim was to stress homogeneity and equality and integration. The nature of their industries projected an inner core of certain beliefs despite the strikingly different personalities. They learned about teamwork because their survival depended on it and their social networks, in the clubs and allotments, were concentrated near to the workplace - the pits, or the railway. It came as no surprise, therefore, that the railwaymen seemed uncomfortable with my references to their family and social life outside work, for their social life was *internal to* their work; it comprised their workmates, not their wives, whilst their family life comprised a private domesticity aspects about which it would have been dishonourable to comment publicly upon. Whenever I raised questions on these topics they steered away, with suggestions that I speak to some of the older women in the village, or with a rapid and abrupt change to another subject.

The railwaymen, as the following narrative reveals, weren't ignorant of the burdens under which their wives worked. They knew that 'a' mithers go tae work'; it was simply that this was not work with which they were acquainted. Thus Hugh suggested that "tae get the true aspect o' the social side, ye'd hae tae get the women involved in it because they had tae put up wi an awfy lot - husbands on irregular shifts. Ye couldna say whither ye were gaun oot on a certain date because ye never knew whit yer shift wid be.

"Saturday nicht wis oot as far as a lot o' us were concerned. Ye had tae be dedicated tae the job because if ye were no there ye were nae use. Ye had tae turn oot. It ye didna turn oot then it a' fell back on yer mates.

"Some o' us ne'er saw daylight! If ye went tae yer bed efter the nichtshift."

In truth, the men were as enmeshed in their particular social networks as the women were in their own social and kinship networks. Their tragedy was that, in many instances, their fellows in work were no longer alive and therefore that their social networks no longer existed.

Because they rarely worked in isolation the railwaymen and miners did not have the opportunity to be as self-regulating as women. Their world of work was pivotal to dictating their time and energy; its loss meant the loss of their centre of gravity. After

retirement, they faced a gradual but increasing knowledge of physical limitations. As Myerhoff writes: 'The discovery of dependence and weakness later in life shocks the male ego more than the female' (1979:262). The women, after all, knew that they were marginal on every account: working class, old, poor and female. The men, as the breadwinners, would have been considered as superior to the women of their own community; they may have had status within their profession but be nothing outside of it. The men thus occupied conflicting hierarchies. The status of the women was unambiguous: they were on the bottom. Myerhoff suggests that 'perhaps the simplicity and consistency of this arrangement makes it easier for them to work out personal solutions' (1979:262). If they failed in these personal solutions they could always legitimise this failure by pointing out their social definition.

Relating the instrumental and expressive domains

At both Phillip House and Windsor Court the major feature among roles allocated to the elderly was their primarily expressive nature. Retired people, as a rule, are expected to spend their time socialising, taking care of themselves, passing the days pleasantly, attending to quality of life and interpersonal concerns (Myerhoff, 1979:262). At Phillip House, as documented in chapter 9, the family home's ideal of a rigid sexual division of labour sometimes underlay the division of labour in the context of clubs and events: men doing 'men's work; women doing 'women's work'. And, sometimes, women doing 'men's work'; although, rarely, men doing 'women's work'. In this context, the stereotyped and celebrated image of men related to work - hardships, danger and outcome and attainment - could be kept separate from that of women, related to home, and its more diffuse emotional and biological concerns. Yet to draw on these crude images as unmalleable and as the only sources informing their present identities would be to greatly over-simplify both past and present roles. Central gender identities, within which the residents' former lives had been created, informed the division of labour, even within their new environments. But it was not one based on an expressive-instrumental dichotomy. The dualism resided in each role.

I would like to suggest that the reason for the dominance of one or the other may be found in the role expectations concerning competence among older men and women. As I suggest below these expectations differ between generations so that the expectations of the old among the young may differ from the expectations of the old among the old. In the same way in which there have been, for example, social changes in sex role definitions (such as women becoming the bread winners) it may well be

that social changes in age role definitions will come about, so that the old, regardless of gender, may be required to demonstrate more instrumental skills. Any potential age-role 'confusion' is incurred only by the standards of the past - not by the standards of what is required for contemporary competence in old age.

It would thus be wrong to draw the conclusion that the expansion of the expressive domain *necessarily* entails a concomitant contraction of the instrumental. Even when it seemed clear, through narrative, that the instrumentality associated with men's previous working roles was not usually carried over into their roles within the family, there were other ways in which the instrumental domain might emerge. Perhaps this, in itself, was a latent need met by the performance of the oral history group. Within this setting memories of work were indulged and vicariously lived experiences reassembled and retravelled thus replaying them within the instrumental domain. During the administration of business and in the organisation of group events the links to the instrumental dimension of life were renewed and kept alive, the railwaymen establishing their professional postures as they sought to command attention in taking responsibility in any area.

In another example, as the narrative below suggests, loss of paid employment among men did not necessarily lead to the complete loss of the instrumental task of providing for the family's material well-being.

"From the time Ah wis five or six year auld," Sarah had told me, "ma Da wisnae able tae work. He had stomach ulcers an' he wis a miner an' they widna let him gae intae the pit again. So we were livin' on, nae dough, but insurance! An' it wisnae a fortune! It wis worse than dough. It wis..." She paused, her eyes blazing as she searched for an appropriate term, then retorted lamely, "It wis a mere trickle.

"Ma mither was a guid manager. Thank guidness" said Bella. "Ma Dad wisnae able tae work but he mended oor shoes, he dug the garden, he planted - we'd only a tiny garden - but he planted it a', an' when the early potatoes come oot, the leeks went in, so we'd get twa crops oot o' that patch. He grew lettuce...he grew cabbage... he hadna much success wi his cauliflowers mair than ma husband had," she laughed. "But he tended the garden so that we a'ways had somethin'. We never went hungry, mind, lots o' people thats faithers were workin' went hungry. But we never did!"

It has been argued by Myerhoff (1979:262) that, with the loss of paid employment after retirement, there is an immense cost to men, not only in financial terms but in terms of self-worth and autonomy - the more so because these are indelibly linked to the

ideological imperatives of leadership and authority, achievement, problem-solving and the accomplishment of clear-cut goals. Yet, if such a state of affairs seems logical and plausible, inferring that in later years this gives women 'an enormous advantage over men' (Myerhoff, 1979:262) it did not always seem to manifest itself in obvious ways nor lead to a radical differentiation that would allow one to conclude, at least in this study, that women age better than men.

Perhaps the confusion deriving from our ignorance in this domain derives from a tendency to focus on the characteristics of the instrumental domain in the male work place at the expense of the understanding of the usage of expressive skills among men. Clearly, we should not negate the possibility of a number of expressive requirements for adequate performance in the role of 'work-mate' simply because these have not been explored. Neither should we assume that the man performing an instrumental role as 'miner' or railwayman' at work could not also exercise an expressive role at home. Machismo and brawn at work were not required at home. At home, in the private sphere, the men were husbands and fathers. A successful, dominant and assertive miner at work could still be a passive, dependent or nurturing husband at home. Further, as a relational experience, the discourse in the railwaymen's oral history group was primarily of an expressive nature. The railwaymen's relations with other men at the oral history group epitomised those they had had whilst working among their colleagues, implying that within the bread-winning, instrumental role, there were also considerable integrative skills at work.

Personal resources and inner sustenance

As a result of the discrepancy between the options offered them by society and the potential they find within themselves, it is argued by Meyer Spacks (1975:241). that women, more consistently than men, are expected to turn inwards for personal solutions or sustenance. Meyer Spacks suggests that women frequently have complex inner lives, worlds of fantasy: their gender entitling them to 'the indulgence of an inner life' (1975:241). Yet these statements also conflicted with the spoken reality I found among the old in West Fife. Here, it was the men who demonstrated through their autobiographies an inner life and the immense empowerment of 'inner sustenance'. This suggests that although the women were harbingers of earlier expressive specialisation, yet it was not outside the bounds of possibility for the men to develop their own expressive specialisation in terms of autobiography. Certainly Jim and Fergus were living proof of this and, as documented above, the railwaymen's oral history group was experience yielding both expressive and instrumental dimensions.

It is, of course, impossible to generalise. For the men to whom I refer were almost all individuals who had recognised in the early part of their lives a grave discrepancy between the options offered them by society and the potential they found within themselves. Their lives had consisted of removing this discrepancy. For many working class men in Fife, however, this discrepancy would have determined and shaped their entire life course.

Again, it is impossible to generalise, but one might add that the sharp contraction of the instrumental domain, brought about by formal retirement and then physical disempowerment, provides an unacknowledged opportunity to men to widen their experience of the expressive domain but that this opportunity is one which only some recognise, grasp and build upon. There was a vivid reminder of this on one occasion I visited Fergus and Bertha in their home. Fergus took down one of the violins he had made and displayed on the wall of the living room. He handled it carefully but expertly. With the clarity of sudden insight I began to see this violin as a metaphor for Fergus' life. It was a symbol of completeness; in the widest possible sense it symbolised the achievement of a potential he had known within himself. It had started off as a simple piece of wood. Out of this raw material it would have been impossible to tell that something as intricate and elegant and finished would have been shaped and whittled and carved. But there it was. That wooden instrument was symbolic of the finished product of his life.

Gender identity as generational identity

In approaching the close of this chapter I echo one of my opening questions. Why did the women in the reminiscence group choose to construct narratives of their lives that seemed to undermine themselves? In the following paragraphs I wish to focus on the positive aspects of the women's self-representation and, in doing so, to illuminate what has been missing in this account so far: a critical evaluation of my own perspective.

'My' women were not writers; nor were they public performers; but they were mothers, wives, aunts, grandmothers, great-grandmothers. Their identities, so it seemed, were culturally conditioned manifestations of the ideology of gender that associates female difference with attentiveness to the other. Even if these were the identities they preferred to pursue in public was this in reality a problem or was I simply, *vide* chapter 9, making it into one? It was, after all, a common way of communicating. Pat Straw, for example, in her study of working class women, wrote that all the women she spoke

to defined themselves principally in relation to their family situation, in terms of one or more of daughter, mother, granny and so on. 'Young or old they talked about their lives from the perspective of their home and family experiences' (Straw, 1986:16).

Once again, I was confronted with the issue of the construction of self in old age. For it seemed to me that, if women in the reminiscence group chose to be remembered not in terms of what they had achieved as the woman Mabel, as Margaret, as Bella, but in terms of their relationships as Peter's mother (Mabel), as Rebecca's granny (Margaret), or as Jimmie's wife (Bella) then this was because it was their preferred form of address and their chosen means of self-preservation. In the same way, at formal events, documented in chapter 8, the Windsor Court women preferred the use of surnames rather than first names.

Essential to personal identity therefore was the centrality of a location, both stable and symbolic, within the family unit. Identification in terms of some other individual drew ties between members of the family unit. As the main institutional setting for childhood (Jerrome, 1993:226) it is possible, as noted earlier in chapter 10, that the single most important discontinuity of the women's lives involved change in the stability of this family unit. Whether this was more myth than reality, there was certainly a perception of change in the stability of what they saw as the world around. For the moment I will simply draw attention to the fact that the twentieth century had taken these women from a steady, coherent, predictable folk world, guided by a tight consensus of family and a homogeneous world of the neighbourhood, into a wholly unpredictable world, where sociable relations were forever undergoing severance and metamorphosis. The breakdown of the natal community, the segmenting of social relations in Dunfermline and surrounding villages, the rapid social change and geographical mobility constituted a profound contrast with the stable rhythms of the past.

Under such circumstances the women may have felt submerged by the precariousness of their lives, were it not for a number of ways in which they unwittingly drew on their past experiences and thereby reinforced their present lives. In particular, these experiences were deeply embedded in the inextricable ones of wife and motherhood, underwritten by the mining culture. Their core gender identity was based not so much on sexual difference but on generational linkage, the research of Ernest A. Abelin (discussed in Woodward, 1995:85) lending support for such an interpretation. By drawing unself-consciously on continuities between childhood and old age the women created generational identity and - without knowing it - a means of self-preservation.

> Generational identity establishes the self 'between' two objects, along one linear dimension. 'I am smaller than mother, but bigger than baby, ' or, rather, in terms of wishes: 'I wish to be taken care of by mother and I wish to take care of baby.' By contrast, gender identity classifies the self in relation to the dichotomy male/female.
>
> Abelin, 1980:158

Ultimately it was these continuities between childhood and old age that provided the basis for the creation for a distinctive way of life, albeit fragmented, contrived and constructed out of desperate need, nevertheless to be counted as a major gain over and against the losses they had experienced.

That the women did not want to give me full accounts of their lives said a great deal about them, even if this was in unspoken form. I found the insights of Kathleen Woodward, in her essay 'Tribute to the older woman' (1995:96), together with the closing chapter of Pat Straw's study (1986:415-436) helped me in my struggle to understand the implications of this. I learned a significant lesson. My entire interpretation of the responses of the women in the reminiscence group, as mirrors reflecting their self-identity, required adjustment. What right had I to expect to hear the answers that *I* would give to the questions I asked of these women? I had forgotten the lesson we too often forget: to 'remember to respect the differences rooted in history' (Woodward, 1995:90). Critically evaluating the work of Nancy Chodorow, Woodward (1995:90) draws attention to Chodorow's insight that older women have 'a different form of gender consciousness, or gender identity' and that 'differences in women's interpretations of a situation may be understood not only in terms of structural categories like class and race but also historically, culturally and generationally' (Chodorow, in Woodward, 1995:90). Putting it in my own words, I, and other woman of the nineties, in *our* generation, are characterised by a 'hyper-gender-sensitivity' (Woodward, 1995:90). This sensitivity contributed to a crucial difference between the way in which I drew conclusions about the women's representations in the reminiscence group and their self-representations. The set of understandings shared among women, concerning the value and meaning of their conventional functions - what Metzger (1977) refers to as 'women's culture' - were characterised by a generational difference. There was a vertical relationship and sense of mutual recognition between them and me but their generational thinking did not, and could not, mirror mine.

The women had started their working lives as 'mother's little helper'. Now, in a modern world of pluralistic cultures, they drew deeply upon their first emotional social experiences which had arisen in a context of nurturance and dependence,

evoking the familiar domestic domain, preceding language and conceptualization. It is suggested by Myerhoff (1984:327) that these first experiences of nurturance, set in the context of domestic life, are often associated with ethnic origins, bound up with first foods, touch, language, song, folklore, and so on, carried and connoted by rituals and symbols learned in that context. Myerhoff (1984:327) refers to such rites as 'domestic religion', stressing that they often harbour profoundly emotional associations and are often the means for carrying one back to earlier times and selves. As the women had 'progressed' to become wife and then mother, they would then transfer this 'domestic religion' to their own children. So embedded in local tradition was it that the women did not see the significance nor did they recognise the sacrality of this 'domestic religion'. Yet it was this that was responsible for their control of the entire domestic situation and it permeated through their almost complete responsibility for the upbringing of the children and their care of the elderly and others within the family and community.

The women were 'gatekeepers' of family and community history; they erected 'structures of perceiving' (Straw, 1986:434) for their own future generations; but for outsiders, like myself, within the artificial cell of the reminiscence group, most of what was perceived had to be drawn from what was vocalised and, in the form of silence, this proved both of formidable opposition and formidable strength.

What I had initially seen as deeply antithetical: the contradiction between the inner concourse of the women's autobiographies - simple utterances concealing strongholds of moral and domestic order - and their perception externally as irregular and disorderly, required revision. For surely it was the very omissions and absences which were significant. It was these to which external perceptions had failed to give sufficient prominence. Silence was thus deeply eloquent: the women's language within a ritually-created anti-structure. It empowered them by providing them with the means by which they could 'tidy up' their history. The effect was to transmit, through the fragments of past experience, a moral order. The women were the custodians not only of a 'domestic religion' but a moral order that was transmitted through the symbols and silences of their public lives.

Thus, during meetings of the reminiscence group and, indeed, within a range of other fora, what mattered was not only what *was* said, but also what was *not* said. Embedded in the social structure, the autobiography of the lives of the women, as a narrative of achievements, was incompatible with their feelings about the nature of their lives. This was articulated indirectly. Sometimes, they taught me by revealing within a few

sparse sentences a world that they themselves sensed would be outside my own understanding. At other times I was made to work hard to read the significance of the message behind a dry comment or remark. Sometimes I had to learn from the silence itself.

Collective honour was a necessary criterion for disciplining any individual striving for recognition. It allowed the women to acknowledge for themselves their individual honour and dignity through a collective appraisal rather than the evaluation of individuals' traits - which would in any case have shown up all their inadequacies as well as draw attention to themselves and give honour and prestige to the self. At the same time, the women were acutely aware of the limiting boundaries they were drawing around their own self-worth. They knew that through denying others an opportunity to 'know' the real self they were allowing the possibility that their own self-worth would be valued according to how much they allowed to be revealed. Yet, this stance allowed them the possibility of retaining the mystery of their lives and their self, and with that, the possibility that they were considerably more than they allowed others to see. For it was not the women but myself who left the room each Monday afternoon with the knowledge that I, rather than they, had been unable to achieve what I had set out to do.

Concluding comments

Although I have drawn comparisons, in this chapter, between the recollective work of the women at Phillip House and that of Jim, Fergus and the railwaymen, respectively, there is no intention to draw definitive conclusions from such comparisons. This does not, of course, offer an amnesty from the notion that there may be wider truths to be drawn from the particular examples documented here.

The women's autobiographical accounts emerging from within the practice of the Phillip House reminiscence group told me little about the women themselves. It is of great significance that the railwaymen talked among themselves of their outstanding achievements as individuals while, for example, the woman who received the BEM for her outstanding achievement in the war could not declare this among her peers. It would have been possible to draw the conclusion that the women lacked the self-confidence and recognition of self-worth to proclaim the value of their lives. On the surface of it, the men talking about themselves assumed a privileged place in the canon; the women, talking about themselves, a marginalised and devalued position. Yet, it seemed rather that there was a deliberate intention on their part to retain their

'hidden selves'. Certainly, there was a generational difference articulated most clearly through the tacit recognition that if they were to assert the exemplary shape of their experience that they would then be obliged to defend themselves against the charge of vanity. What the women brought to my attention, therefore, was the value of the lives lived by all women in their position - a collective honour as wives, as mothers, as carers, as nurturers, as cleaners, cooks and dress-makers - as a consequence of their position in the social structure. The women experienced a sense of solidarity which came from a life of sharing this same work. The solidarity experienced by the men was rather different. It was one of co-operation and a division of labour and team work. Though directly involved through the labour market and trade unions in the class structure the men, in terms of their personal relationships and recollections, were much more concerned with each others' performances and achievements as individuals and 'characters'. It was here that esteem was won.

What had served as guides for the men - the fine distinctions between public and private, or trivial and important - had never really been available to the women. By contrast, they were marginal to the social structure. Socio-cultural conditioning had taught them that what was 'important' for them lay wholly in the private sphere, having no public consequence. They were therefore excluded from winning esteem as individuals except vicariously, through social relationships. Precisely because of this they were much more interested in the practicalities of their involvement in, and therefore the workings of, the social structure, that is, in marriage and the family, and social mobility - 'bettering' oneself and one's children.

Finally, the differential consequences of the engagement of gender, agency and social structure for the sense of identity of men and women suggests that, above all, there is a need to understand better the way in which individuals interpret experience. This may require the introduction of different research methods to the standard 'scientific' paradigms, and finding a meeting place between phenomenological, anthropological and sociological perspectives. Theories such as those discussed by Coleman (1993a:68-96), and supported by the observations made in this study, emphasise the salience of 'inner life' and reflexivity in old age. If this is correct, and development of identity in later life becomes more concerned with self-knowledge and self-awareness than external achievement, then we would do well to make greater use of the individual as reporting and predicting agent, recognising that the standard probes we use in one context may not be appropriate in another.

Section 5

The conclusion

Chapter 14

Conclusion

Introduction

To attempt a conclusion that gives a condensed guide to all the complexities and ambiguities thrown up by the diversity of the ethnographic data set out here, is problematic. I began my study without the attire of previously identified problems. The questions I eventually asked emerged from the findings, rather than the other way round. Not wishing to compromise or misrepresent the complexities discussed in previous chapters, I have set myself three tasks in this chapter. The first is to summarise the problems of identity manifested through the responses of the elderly in this study to physiological ageing and to culturally constructed transitions of growing old; the second is to draw together my conclusions about the meanings for the same elderly of selfhood and identity established through performance. In particular, I return to issues raised in earlier chapters about the extent to which different people are embedded to different degrees in sets of local or non-local relationships which inform their sense of self and play a part in locating them socially. Woven through this, I have, thirdly, tried to account for the viability of the sheltered homes and other settings as alternative identity-sustaining realities to previous experience and to present contingencies.

1 - Trials of identity

In her book *The Ageless Self* Kaufman comments that 'old people are not caught up in socialization to old age, nor are their self-concepts based upon socialization to any particular role that might be acquired in old age' (1986:165). The tenor of her thesis lies in attributing to the self the ability to deny old age - this being regarded simply as a social construct. "Being old, *per se*, is not a central feature of the self, nor is it a source of meaning," she writes (1986: 7). Yet whilst such conceptions may be intuitively or politically desirable, they leave problematic the inevitability of biological ageing. Bodies *do* age. People *do* become old. If old people are not caught up in socialization to old age does this then imply that there is no adjustment necessary - no learning to be old? It is difficult to reconcile Kaufman's assertion with, for example, Myerhoff's observation that 'both young and old are uninformed in the management of old age; neither knows what

it may or may not ask and expect of the other' (1984: 312); or Blythe's suggestion that 'with full-span lives the norm, people may need to learn how to be aged as they once had to learn to be adult' (1979: 22).

The ethnography underpinning this study reveals that individuals' sense of the need for adjustment in old age both *results in* and *emerges from* inevitable changes in identity, both as individuals and within society. The situation confronting the elderly was one deriving from two incongruent realities - a personal sense of continuity and the discontinuity of the ageing body. Different environments revealed a tension and struggle between the self and society, in which the self routinely resisted presentation in a social image of elderhood, such resistance being 'the most crucial and most effective defence against disintegration' (Cohen, 1987:17). In what follows my objectives are to present, in as straightforward a way as possible, my conclusions about the competence of performance ritual to assert and create ways in which the elderly negotiate these various tensions and struggles expressed through the discourses of 'change' and 'continuity'; 'identity' and 'belonging'.

2 - Socio-structural constructions of elderhood

As initiatives designed to bring elderly people together, the Windsor Court coffee morning and the lunch club were forms of social engineering. They provided their participants with a different venue for the day, hospitality and interaction with other people. But the collective was a static rather than a dynamic arrangement; passive rather than organic; its strength lying in the hands of those who managed it rather than those who participated in it. Examining how these initiatives were 'managed' revealed some of the tensions and ambiguities about the ways in which individuals became 'socially integrated'.

Like many situations where the image of the collective is governed by external policy-makers (Crow and Allan, 1994:158) the model followed by the wardens and care managers, respectively, drew implicitly on the notion of consensus with little recognition of conflict and competing interests. Subscribing to impersonality and rationality for the important, indeed any, decisions among participants may itself have been partly responsible for the lack of relational developments through the event.
Although some aspects of each 'event' suggested that the managers attempted to foster informal interaction, this was on their terms rather than on the terms of those who participated. In their drive for informality at the lunch club, for example, the managers simply reinforced the institutional aspects of the club. Many of the relationships that

they *were* able to develop were framed in ways that made active caring unlikely. The key point here is that informal relationships did not develop 'naturally' but instead were constructed and, at the same time, modified and distorted during the process of construction.

By making events and activities formal and thus distancing them from their participants; by distancing ideas from knowledge; participants from each other; care managers from participants, the ultimate distancing of life from death was symbolically maintained. The absoluteness of participants' vulnerability combined with an over-riding sense of disempowerment contributed to a manageable social organisation but one which was institutionalised and patronised, promoting invisibility and amplifying participants' feelings of insecurity and vulnerability.

3 - Reconstructions of community

An appeal to a different form of social membership was made, both by the Phillip House warden and the railwaymen, through the language of community. Crow and Allan remind us, however, that 'if the applicability and relevance of (this) term is to do with common membership and a sense of belonging, then it is pertinent to ask about the nature of the solidarities entailed and the level of commitment there is to the community in question' (1994:185).

It might be useful to draw some comparisons about the character of the 'past' social worlds of the elderly and their present ones. A common strand in the imagery of their past social world - the traditional working class community - was the sense that all those who belonged to them were roughly in the same situation as one another. Using Abrams' metaphor, within the communities of the past, there was *extreme social homogeneity* because in every respect everyone is in the same awful boat; *permanence* because there is no prospect of anyone around you getting into any other boat; and *threat* because the winds and waves could overturn and drown the whole lot of you two minutes from now, tomorrow, next week, anytime (1980:14-15, emphases in original). In one sense this imagery could be applied to the present lives now - not to the territorial community of the sheltered home but rather to the 'community' of elderhood itself. Just as in the past, where the inevitability of being 'trapped' as a young adult within the community did not necessarily offer to individuals the feeling of 'belonging', neither did the inevitability of 'entrapment' within elderhood induce, among the elderly, the feeling of 'belonging'.

Where the territorial community and 'elderhood' overlapped without any mitigating features, however, then the metaphor of the boat was as applicable. Among 'traditional' working class communities, Bauman argues that common residence and immobility may create what he calls 'communities by inertia' (1992:xix). At Windsor Court - emphasising the role of its builders and developers, the care workers and government agencies - the overlap of a community of interest and territory had succeeded. Yet this had failed to bring about the sense of shared identity and interaction with the residents which are the defining characteristics of communities of attachment within which solidarities are nurtured (Crow and Allan, 1994:4).

At the heart of community solidarity are informal, largely non-institutionalised relationships (Crow and Allan, 1994). In the past the solidarity was certainly real; people living in one locality did feel a sense of loyalty to it; they were embedded in local economic and social relationships which structured their lives and which effectively tied them to the community. Yet at the same time, not everybody was fully incorporated into close knit social relationships. Just like their present circumstances not everybody had kin who could provide support and the support that *was* given was not always desired. The relationships forming the social networks in which people were involved, were never uniform. Some had fuller networks, extending both within and outwith the home; others sparse networks. Some strove hard to protect their privacy, keeping family and personal matters to themselves; others valued social participation, revealing more of a communal orientation.

Under what circumstances, then, was 'belonging' fostered and nurtured? At Phillip House the twin ideas of belonging and of solidarity were fostered. The explicit aim was to provide a nurturing environment: one which encouraged a sense of belonging; one which attempted to counteract the deprivations of old age; managing to combine the dual requisites of ensuring individuals that they were still part of the structured world beyond the doors of the setting and, yet, clearing the way towards departure from the world. This was a cosmology maintained within the House. It pervaded the definition of reality, surrounding the family atmosphere with a halo of significance. In fostering this myth the warden implanted her own charismatic style of leadership, shaping the sense of identity and refashioning the very meaning of being old in the context of the world 'outside'.

At another level the railwaymen created and forged their own sense of 'belonging' through the reworking of a common social memory. This related to a second common strand in the imagery of 'past' communities - that of a central cultural referent in

people's notion of community (Suttles, 1972) and its characteristic features. The two key elements of hardship and solidarity underlay older peoples' conceptions about their past lives and gave birth to values that defined who they were, how they made sense of the world and among whom they 'belonged'. The railwaymen's memories of their past depended on a social network of these shared experiences, derived through their employment. Solidarity among them was certainly real, but it was a solidarity generated not simply on the commonality of old age or even common employment but rather on something forming a third strand in the imagery of 'past' communities: 'sets of social exchange, conflict, interdependency, antagonism and the like' which form the basis of relationships between people (Crow and Allan, 1994:190). The conduct and management of the meetings supplied a symbolic set of meanings associated with an imagined community, expressing the cardinal features of solidarity, interest and social exchange. This is effectively the means by which the oral history group accomplished for the railwaymen the rehearsal of a collective identity, and the development of their selfhood, their values and their interpretation of the world.

To 'belong' meant different things to different people. 'Belonging' did not necessarily mean the intense camaraderie that Turner refers to as 'communitas' (1969:96). Indeed, 'communitas' was very rarely realised. At Windsor Court, its potential was threatened by the residents being under the control of individuals with quite different interests - 'competing notions of culture' between 'that of the dominated and that of the dominant' (Okely, 1990:195). At Phillip House 'communitas' came about on rare occasions, and then not because residents saw themselves as without class, sharing the common feature of old age and shared locality (although this was a socially and culturally contrived rite of passage), but because of the occasional competence of performance that allowed them to assert their identity through a reworking of the past - the rekindling of a social memory.

'Belonging' depended ultimately on a commitment which was more potent when it incorporated, as among the railwaymen, the added dimension of 'emotional attachment' - rather than just being on the basis of social incorporation into sets of activities and relationships grounded in old age. As James found, in her study of adolescents, it was 'not simply a matter of conforming, of submerging individuality within a general frame. Belonging (was) a question of style: the expression of individuality in particular culturally-defined ways.....a delicate balance between self and others, between individual and conformity' (1986:155-170).

For as much as the coffee morning and the lunch club at Windsor Court appeared to restrict the development of self through inadequacies in the construction of social membership, the study of initiation into these bodies of people clearly suggested that induction into this new kind of social membership had the capacity to remake the self. Selfhood emerged through the creation of individual's own special forms of communicating via performance ritual. Here I draw on Cohen's observation that loss of individuality does not necessarily mean loss of self (1994:177); and, further, that the use of collective forms to assert forms of identities should not be mistaken for uniformities of identity (1994:178).

4 - Reconstructions of kin relationships

A common concern among the elderly was that the social, moral and cultural milieu they espoused seemed to polarise them so radically from today's young, including their kin. Fragmentation and loss of family ties were not perceived simply as the consequence of old age, but were viewed as a predictable result of a range of circumstances: the move to sheltered housing; becoming victim of a terminal illness; increasing ill health.

Cohen (1994: 56) has suggested that 'we become used to our assimilating to our sense of self the succession of social categories through which we are forced to move' as we age. Yet most of the old in this study, whilst equipped with varying degrees of social experience, had never had to move through a succession of social categories. Many were not adept at the changes required of them. Entry into the non-family world of the sheltered homes was not an experience to which most had had previous opportunities to become accustomed. It suspended the familiar role of mother or father and stripped away known identity symbols. Furthermore, access to home and family life as they knew it, and on which we place such extraordinarily high value (Gillis, 1996:21), had been dramatically restructured. The problems articulated in chapters 10 and 13 illustrated this. The consequence of the move was to foster great anxiety among participants - an anxiety communicated most directly through relationships.

Cohen (1994:55) discusses the idiom through which children's sense of self is formulated and anchored as one of possession; a child referring to my Mum, my brother, and so on. Perhaps one of the reasons, for example, why the loss of their links with family was so very devastating was that the old returned - although, perhaps this generation of old never left - to this sense of 'self' rooted in possessiveness, albeit mediated through different ties. Women, in particular, when asked to talk about themselves, drew attention instead to 'my daughter', 'my grandchildren' and so on. They had an intensely

family centred sense of self. It was, perhaps had always been, one in which they had associated other people with them. Their 'expertise' lay deeply embedded in human relationships (Myerhoff, 1979:262).

Although kin relationships featured significantly in the lives of the old, as a source of moral and material support they operated ambiguously. Whilst the old desired their present family contacts to resemble those of the past, a sense of a unity of purpose with a moral obligation expressed as desire, the reality was that many younger members perceived their role, in the context of elderly relatives, to be an obligation or a duty or chore. The identities of the elderly were bound up in these exchanges of support; they were constructed and reconstructed as moral beings; but, in the process, their selves were often diminished.

Whether or not it expressed reality, the idea that 'the family is not what it used to be' was certainly lodged within the minds of many elderly people. But this perception is not one that appears to have changed much over the course of this century. What *has* changed, according to Gillis, are the cultural resources that people living today have at their disposal to cope with the challenge of creating a sense of continuity and permanence (1996:18). Possibly, propagating myths about life as it was, as more stable and united than at present, was their way of achieving this result .

5 - Ritual liminality

In the next part of this chapter, I intend to draw some conclusions about the role of performance ritual in dealing with adjustment to the incongruent realities referred to earlier.

Rituals, as occasions constructed by society, are times of teaching and socialisation. 'They announce our separateness and individuality but at the same time remind us most vividly that existence apart from the group is impossible' (Myerhoff, 1984:310). This paradox carries a message of immense significance for older people: lacking its own integrity and its own structured place in society old age has been compared to ritual liminality - a period of desocialization where older people are found 'at the edge': from the point of view of society they are dispensable; 'their conduct a matter of little consequence; their controls a matter of diminished importance' (Myerhoff, 1984:310).

The phase of transition, charted here by the unknown, has commanded the attention of a number of researchers. In particular, Victor Turner's (1969) elaboration of Van Gennep's early study of rites of passage, where he focused on the middle phase of

liminality, is an exploration of that unknown territory, characterised by rolelessness, neglect and social irrelevance. The idea that this territory also corresponds to that of old age is one supported, among others, by Kaufman who suggests that, after 70, there is less 'fitting into prescribed roles' - taking on socially required identities - acquiring positions of social status - than at any other time in the life cycle (1986:165). In my study, features of liminality were explicitly revealed through the daily progression of internal and external relationships at Windsor Court and the lunch club. They were marked implicitly in other arenas too: the establishment of oral history groups, for example, implies a desire for recognition of particular groups' social relevance in the face of some externally-constructed marginalisation.

Anthropologists such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980:104) have argued that 'ageing' is most intensely stimulated and generated through ritual. Yet I found that it was not the process of 'ageing' itself which was so stimulated, but the intensity of the 'here and now' of a life stage - in this case, old age - an '"other" condition of being' (Turnbull, 1990:80). According to Myerhoff, ritual carries with it 'a basic message about continuity' (1984:306). The process by which it does this is to bring the elderly to the state of liminality. However, although the liminal state is 'not only reached by ritual' (Turnbull, 1990:77) ritual in itself does not 'have the power to induce (liminality) in ritual participants' (Turnbull, 1990:77).

Ultimately, my argument is paradoxical: the institutionalized segmentation of the life course, which makes of old age a rite of transition - bringing uncertainty both to self and society - can be offset by emphasising the stabilising effect of performance rituals of identity. At the same time, ritual may, through the fracture of socio-structural laws, create an anti-structure - a liminal world itself (Turner, 1992: 6). In common with Turnbull (1990:77) these complexities tell me that the notion of a rite of passage as involving mere transition from one status to another is as overly simplistic as our notion of liminality as a medial state. 'Transition' may be a reasonable description of what takes place from a purely objective point of view (that is, for example, the elderly move from one place to another), but that does not mean that it in any way describes the overall process as it is experienced by the elderly themselves. Their experience is one of transformation, with liminality itself being the process of transformation at work (Turnbull, 1990:79).

As long as we insist on taking liminality and, one might argue, old age, to imply a transitory 'between-states-of-being', we fail to recognise its centrality to the social process (Turnbull, 1990:80). In the liminal state disorder is ordered, and doubts and

problems are removed (Turnbull, 1990:80) and, emerging in their stead, the individual's sense of unity as a single person together with the sense of being 'one people'. Integrative of all experience, liminality provides a charter for individual behaviour and, by extension, for communal, social behaviour.

6 - Reconstructions of elderhood through performance ritual

Through performance ritual, I have been concerned to show that older people construct their own terms of membership and establish for themselves their own meanings of selfhood and social identity. Yet, in all this, I have also been concerned to emphasise that neither the self is privileged over society, nor society privileged over self. Attention to the self recognises, however, the need to address individuals' perceptions of society. By this, as Cohen (1994:168) has argued, I mean that the behaviour of individuals is motivated less by a 'self-ish', self-gratifying individualism, in the pursuit of self-interest, and more by their perceptions of themselves and their relationship to society.
My interpretation of the significance of social membership among the elderly lies in the possibility of their constructing the terms of their membership within the development of a new social order and, at the same time, maintaining their self-integrity. 'Social membership' is to be distinguished from socialization - 'the process by which (people) are moulded by their society and the social relationships in which they are involved' (Musgrove, 1977:4). In the context here, the elderly constructed their terms of membership through a basic segregation from society. I don't think it is too misleading to use the term 'initiation' in this context. Within the settings depicted in this study, the elderly were secluded and, to some extent, excluded from the outside world. Within the railwaymen's oral history group the common denominator founded on the ideas of fraternity and solidarity was rehearsed; participants reconstructed a new, albeit temporary, social reality. Within the sheltered homes, the development of a new collective identity was accomplished by the development of a house culture reflected in and enhanced by performance ritual. 'Initiation' into these environments was also encouraged, ironically, by the renunciation of many elements of their past - the suspension of familiar roles; choosing to live in a house with no past and no link between past and present -and the removal of differences in social status. Such renunciation of the past and such obliteration of differentiation emerged during the Phillip House reminiscence group and was assisted by reluctance among the women to discuss their previous lives. In particular, the women drew strongly on the belief that autobiographies of their lives as narratives of achievements were incompatible with their feelings about the nature of their lives. These sentiments were also powerfully

influenced by a socially ascribed marginality with which they had associated since childhood. Socio-cultural conditioning comprised not only their version of themselves as children, including their social status and image, but also their construction of old age when they were young and growing up into middle age.

For all its desocializing characteristics, however, it is worth remembering that from such a rite of passage evolved older peoples' experience of their uniqueness and freedom from conventionalities. Thus, for many of the elderly, it was perhaps their isolation from their children - ironically, the very condition that caused them so much grief - which was responsible for allowing their own fragile culture of their late years to emerge as fully as it did. Their culture was not an intellectual nor a definite response to being old or even to being 'a miner's lass' or 'frae Dunfermline' - none of which would have been the natural outgrowings of their years. It was not a thing of locality or language. The seeds of their culture had been sown many years before; it was always in the stage of becoming. Like a garden, never quite reaching maturity, it was always in an on-going process of renewal. This, for want of better words, was a culture of creativity. It was this that was ultimately responsible for the residents providing me with access to their selves.

7 - Reconstructions of selfhood through performance ritual

Performance rituals, although ultimately social matters, are enacted individually (Myerhoff, 1984:313). Anthropologists have conventionally concentrated on rites of identity (Myerhoff, 1984:178) through which they have regarded individuals as being led into approved social constructions of the person. But this avoids examining the ensuing clash between the person's sense of self and the identity imposed on him or her (for example, in the lunch club). This is a conflict essentially about who has the right to define an individual's identity. Personal identity is, claims Cohen (1993:59), a human right - a right which makes it crucial to take account of individuals' sense of their difference from others.

If one accepts, on the one hand, the importance of performance ritual in terms of enhancing social integration and, on the other, the self's desire for understanding of being, participation in performance that deals with unconscious knowledge and calls up symbolic experiences may be deeply significant. Reference has been made to the complexity of the relationship of ritual to reflexive knowledge. On the one hand the ritual may encourage reflexivity; on the other it may still reflection. The very predictability of the ritual provides the safeguard within which the individual may be

transported beyond their rational imaginings. This ambiguous relationship becomes even more complex with old age, where it is thought that there is a tendency for the drive for reflexive knowledge to increase; old age being associated with growing consciousness of self and philosophical and eschatological reflection (Myerhoff, 1984:315). One rite of passage thus drives the creation of others, leading to 'embedded performances' - performances within performances. When one peels back the layers, one moves closer to the essence of the performance - reflexivity: the work of paying attention to one's experience (Daly, 1996:46).

Among men, the consequence of such embedded performance was particularly powerful. The railwaymen's ambition was to emphasise both the outer (common class, age, locality and occupation) and the inner (individual assertions about life on the railways) dimensions. The recounting of their shared experience served less in the reconstruction of community, however, than in the reconstruction of self. Like Jim and Fergus, they used the rite of reminiscing, reconstructing their working lives in terms of reconstructions of their selves, drawing from previous experience to buffer present external contingencies with the creation of a viable alternative reality. Each man drew, as Kaufman has suggested, from the past, 'interpreting and recreating it as a resource for being in the present' (1986:14).

Drawing from Bryan Turner's concept of 'ultimate concern', and adopting a definition of religion as those things which ultimately concern us (Turner, 1995:257), the corpus of memories of life on the railways rather than being a target of secular practices was in fact a sacred issue in the men's contemporary social world. Only those of that generation, however, were able to recognise its sanctity. In a similar fashion, Jim's experiences of the War were not only in themselves sacred, but their very reconstruction was sacred. The autobiographical process became, in itself, a rite of identity sanctifying his memories.

A similar potency emerged among the women at the lunch club Christmas party. May's song bequeathed a 'transformation', the kind to which Susanne K. Langer (1960) refers 'when symbol and object seem to fuse'. At such times participants are carried beyond words and word-bound thought, being drawn into an unseen but vivid reality 'altering conceptions at a single stroke'.

Not all rites of passage, even ones in which individuals are remade or re-born, require transformations (Myerhoff, 1990:246). May's song was a performance, altering the composure of identity (States, 1985:159). In order to provide the experiences manifested,

in which individuals were 'lost' or 'carried away', transformation of consciousness was an essential ingredient (Myerhoff, 1990:246). Geertz (1965:23) observes that these sort of events allow 'the dreamed-of order' to merge with 'the lived-in order' and the initiate to pass into a new state of being. Far from the secular celebration that may have been expected when the religious carol was superseded by the secular song, the latter evoked a sacred moment, a triumph of understanding and belief, illuminating the lives of those who were present. It was, simultaneously, a moment experienced as intensely individual; intensely unique. Here was the self as 'the interpreter of experience' (Kaufman, 1986:14). Here was selfhood revealed by the 'patterns of symbolic meaning that characterised the individual's unique interpretation of experience' (Kaufman, 1986:14). At that most transformative point of the performance, one might argue, like Blau (1990) that it was not an agency of 'communitas'. Yet, to the observer, it was impossible not to give recognition to the essential and generic human bond, between the participants of that sacred 'moment in and out of time' (Turner, 1969:96). The homogeneity of the social relationship thus implied did not prevent it from being experienced in different ways by everybody involved. 'Communitas' was dynamic, expressing not so much the authority of the group but that of the self, which maintained continuity through a symbolic, creative process, despite the physical and social changes that came with age: a sense of self to which Kaufman (1986) referred as 'ageless'.

The contrasting episode focusing on the doll brought into focus some additional issues emanating from this intertwining of the ritual and the reflexive, particularly that of 'intensifying the present'. A phenomenon which is arguably solely a feature of selfhood, Hazan (1980:178), in his study of elderly Jewish people at a London day centre, treated the arrest of time and the formation of a present-oriented society as a reaction to a temporal incongruity' (1980:178), permitting a 'renewal of the participants' social "being"' (1980:177). Bryan Turner argues that human beings are 'anticipatory beings, directing their actions towards future contingencies' (1995:248); yet, at the same time, by the very fact of conscious memory, they are 'necessarily aware of their own finitude, of the passing of time and, therefore, inevitably aware of their own inexorable fate' (1995:248). Whilst in societies of all kinds, the old experience an inevitable heightening of awareness by virtue of the anticipation of the nearness of death (Myerhoff, 1979:7;25) it is not merely this that so enlivens them. It is also their survival of loved ones and the responsibility generated by this. The elderly were compelled to come to terms with their various losses: spouses, parents, perhaps children, almost definitely their natal world - the process of 'coming to terms with' being always an individual one.

8 - 'Viable alternative realities' in old age

Like the clubs for the aged studied by Okely (1990:195), far from being proof of homogeneity the peer group settings studied here were arenas for contrasting differences. Indeed, I would argue that, ironically, they *encouraged* contrasting differences. Despite the stereotyping their members endured and the collectively imposed identity secured by their membership of a club or building, the lunch club women, like the men and women at Windsor Court and Phillip House, were acutely conscious of their distinctive identities. Unlike children (James, 1986:162) they aspired not towards some sort of model of or uniform set of qualities embraced by old age, but towards their individuality. In direct contrast to Cohen's (1994:66) point, the aspiration to individuality proceeded from the awareness of 'sameness' or stereotyping. These aspirations were a product of how they thought their peers and families now saw them, how they thought they were sere seen by those in authority and how they thought they were seen by the outside world. Drawing from Cohen's explanation in the context of Whalsay, where each 'community' was 'too small, too isolated and socially too compact to withstand the unfettered battle of egos' (1987:64), one might argue that, under certain conditions, peer group competition among the elderly was similarly 'limited and codified' (1987:64). In contrast, however, this resulted in, not 'harmony' (1987:64), but a *truce* of collectivity and individuality, diminishing rather than recognising the identity needs of each. During the coffee morning at Windsor Court and the lunch club the women desocialized each other.

It is arguable, therefore, that expressions of selfhood are sometimes established within the elderly peer group by the very forces that apparently combine to obviate such expressions. By altering the consciousness of its members performance ritual *can* be an active agent of change. But the type of authority formulated thereby tends to make ritual activities effective in grounding and displaying a sense of community only when it does not override the autonomy of individuals (Bell, 1992:221). This is significant. Community spirit, for example, cannot be artificially created (Skidmore, 1994: 84); neither do rites of passage cause social integration; rather, they reflect and enhance it (Myerhoff, 1984: 316) or, occasionally, rupture it (Turner, 1992:6). Performance ritual cannot therefore turn a group of individuals into a community if they have no other relationships or interest in common, nor can it turn the exercise of pure physical compulsion into participatory communality (Bell, 1992:222). What it *can* do, however, is to create a way of doing things that trigger the perception that these performances are distinct and the associations that they engender are special. Through this it can

generate forms of empowerment that are capable of articulating an understanding of the categories of the personal self *vis-a-vis* the social body, thought *vis-a-vis* action, but, ultimately, only when the performance itself is amenable to some degree of individual appropriation.

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